AFRICA@WAR 65

COPPER WINGS

BRITISH SOUTH AFRICA POLICE RESERVE AIR WING

VOLUME 1

ZS-JKX
LAKE AIR
STOL
LAKE AIR
WATER LEVEL

Guy Ellis

AFRICA@WAR SERIES

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South Africa

Note: In order to simplify the use of this book, all names, locations and geographic designations are as provided in *The Times World Atlas*, or other traditionally accepted major sources of reference, as of the time of described events.

Abbreviations

Agric Alert	a system that connected farmers together which would be triggered when an attack took place to summon help
AGL	above ground level
BSAP	British South Africa Police
Casevac	casualty evacuation, generally a military term indicating someone with a serious injury that requires immediate medical care
CT	communist terrorist, also terrorist, or terr, or gook
DCA	Directorate of Civil Aviation
FAF	Forward Airfield
G Car	Alouette III SA316B helicopter with a crew of two and four fully equipped troops, sometimes armed
JOC	Joint Operational Command
K Car	Alouette III SA316B helicopter with a crew of two and the Fire Force commander. Armed with twin mounted Browning .303 machine guns and later 20mm cannon
Kopje	a small rocky hill
Landtail	ground based and transported element of a Fire Force formation
Magandanga	terrorists (Shona language)
Mujiba	mostly young male nationalist supporters who acted as messengers and gathered information. Mujiba in Shona means ‘in the field’ the eyes and ears of the insurgents
Masodja	RAR soldier or troops
O.P.	Observation Post
The Outpost Magazine	the official magazine of the British South Africa Police
PATU	Police Anti-Terrorist Unit
PGHQ	Police General Headquarters
PRO	Police Reserve Observer
PRP	Police Reserve Pilot
RAR	Rhodesian African Rifles Regiment
RhAF	Rhodesian Air Force
RRAF	Royal Rhodesian Air Force up until UDI (Unilateral Declaration of Independence)
PRAW	Police Reserve Air Wing
RSF	Rhodesian Security Forces
Salisbury	the capital of Rhodesia now Harare Zimbabwe
SALOPS	Salisbury Operations
SFA	Special Forces Auxiliary
Stick	usually a group of four to six police or army patrol
Troopie	Rhodesian soldier
TTL	Tribal Trust Land

Preface

This is a brief account of a unique group, which began as a service to the police and ended filling gaps for a very stretched military force. It is not a day-to-day account, or a full history, as much of the documentary evidence has been destroyed, and many of the participants have died, but it is an attempt to develop an idea of how this unit operated and what they achieved.

The father of history, Herodotus, wrote that his ‘own responsibility… is simply to record whatever I may have been told by my sources.’ Following this principle, certain terms and names used in the narrative are of the time. It is distracting to see both old and new place names in the text and as the first-hand accounts will always refer to names that existed at the time, these have been retained. In a similar manner the terminology used with reference to the groups that opposed the Rhodesian Government largely remain as they were used at the time. The use of these is for historical and contextual reasons and is not in any way political. The main text is followed by direct submissions from crew members as they recall their experiences and have been retained largely unedited as they form an important record of the history of this time.

This is also not the place to consider any political analysis and attempts to contact the veterans of Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) for their experiences with PRAW, have been unsuccessful.

Of course, this work has relied on contributions from many people and organisations. Paul Brewster, the BSAP Regimental Association (UK) branch historian has been extremely helpful and through his in-depth knowledge of BSAP awards he has contributed details and images of those bestowed on pilots and observers. In addition, the Association kindly gave me special permission to quote from their comprehensive collection of *The Outpost Magazine* held on a set of CDs that are sold in aid of Regimental funds. Wayne Kennerley’s writings on the BSAP, ‘Flying Coppers’ and ‘Rhodesia’s Second Air Force,’ were an invaluable source of information and reference. Wayne took up the mantle from Peter and Anne Cooke who compiled the list of PRAW members and produced a valuable database that he has generously allowed to be included in this work. In addition, Wayne, and Dave Needham, with input from Ray Watts and myself, developed the aircraft list. Both the members and aircraft lists are as complete as possible, but all concerned would be interested to learn of any corrections or additions.

I am indebted to Bill Linfield, who served for a time as the commander of the unit, for his invaluable support to this project. He was the inspiration for the structure of the work and has contributed so much by way of content and corrections as well as answering a myriad of follow up questions. Anthony Trethowan, Brian van Buuren, Bob Fernandes, John Steed, Gerry Cleveland,

John Munro, Bob Needham, Peter Marchussen, Tony Mann, Mike Norton, John Tayler, Doug Towler, and Richard Wood, all provided me with their stories or allowed me to quote from their books. Orlie Anderson facilitated phone calls with her mother Shelagh, who sadly passed away within a few weeks of our last call. Dave and Julian Scales spent time on the phone telling me about their father Peter, and Andrew Watson wrote about his father's Beechcraft Bonanza. Mimi Cawood related her experiences as a radio operator stationed at Beltbridge and introduced me to Don Price who filled in the events that happened on the southern border. Andrew Tefler, ex RAR was always available to provide context and detail relevant to this unit. Late in the day I contacted Rod Bater, who kindly took the time to fill in some important details. Hugh Bomford of The Lion & Tusk – Museum of the Rhodesian Services Association at Mount Maunganui – www.thelionandtusk.org – put the word out to members and Sue Onslow allowed me to reference her work with Rhodesian ex-servicemen.

Thank you to all those who provided their photographs and access to the articles referenced. Particularly Alan Murray's family and friends and especially Keith Holshausen who rescued several of *The Outpost* images that had been thrown away. To Eduard Pietersen, who sadly passed away in early 2022, for his help and comments. Special thanks to Robin Norton who had the foresight to record Rhodesian aviation history on film. It is a privilege to have his permission to use some of his images that have added a valuable element to this work. Every effort has been made to establish and acknowledge ownership of the images provided.

There will no doubt be errors and questions, but this kind of work is not an exact science. It is subject to the passing of time, to a lack of original documents and to my understanding of what I am told.

Thank you to Tanya De Leersnyder for her support at all levels throughout this two-year project.

Guy Ellis
Gloucestershire 2022

1

Rhodesia at War, July 1964 to December 1979

The Second Chimurenga

The causes of the Rhodesian Bush War or Second *Chimurenga* (Shona for rebellion) are complex and have already been covered by many articles and books, but a very brief background is required to understand the nature of the Police Reserve Air Wing operations.

Post World War II, the colonial countries of Africa sought self-governance. In many cases, resistance movements were supported by Russia and China who saw an opportunity to expand their political influence and so gain access to minerals and to land.

The possibility of on-going conflict, political pressures, and the financial burden of administrating the colonies led to a comparatively quick handover of power from the imperial countries to local administrations. Britain's insistence that Southern Rhodesia's independence would only be granted if based on majority rule, led to UDI from Britain, on 11 November 1965. The Rhodesian Government argued that it would not hand over to Marxist backed forces. In response, the United Nations passed Resolution 216, sanctioning any dealings with the illegal state of Rhodesia.

Two nationalist organisations, founded in the early 1960s, had from 1964 engaged in armed conflict against the government. ZANU eventually led by Robert Mugabe and its military wing Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) enjoyed support from China. While Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and their military wing Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) benefitted from Russian funding and arms. The Rhodesian Government argued that it was fighting to maintain western values and against the spread of communism while ZANU and ZAPU were fighting for universal suffrage and against colonist rule.

Without funds to purchase and run their own aircraft, the Rhodesian Police set up the British South Africa Police Reserve Air Wing (PRAW). Private aircraft flown by volunteers, mostly owner pilots, extended policing across a country of few roads, remote villages, and farms, separated by long distances. PRAW provided the police with a medical emergency capability and an efficient communications and transport network.

A similar idea was introduced in Kenya in 1949, under the direction of the provincial commandant at Nairobi West, Wing Commander A. N. Francombe, DSO, MBE. It had proved to be

The Piper PA-20-135 Pacer was a four-seater, fixed undercarriage aircraft, powered by a 135hp Lycoming engine and built in the early 1950s. Jimmy Aitken's VP-YRV looks very speedy here in this low level fly past. (Jimmy Aitken)

This 1947 model Stinson Voyager VP-WCV was imported into Rhodesia and flown on PRAW duties by Peter Scales. Airworthy in South Africa as ZS-JKV. (Photo by Julian Scales)

Bill Ludgater with his Auster J/1 Autocrat shortly after taking delivery of it in 1952. He later became the commander of the Mazoe Flight and had sold the Auster by 1968. (Photo by Jon Ludgater)

invaluable for communications and as an air ambulance service. With a single Auster the Kenya Police Air wing (KPRAW) charted aircraft as required or relied on volunteers using their own aircraft. These were mostly ex-RAF pilots, who were paid for their part time service. The Mau-Mau rebellion of October 1952 saw an expansion of KRAW's operations, and a headquarters unit and three squadrons were formed. East African Airways aircraft were used by the transport squadron, charter aircraft for communications and privately owned or Aero Club aircraft for reconnaissance. In addition, the police purchased 10 Piper Tri-Pacer 135s in April 1953, which were operated on the civilian VP register. The Tri-Pacer was later supplemented with the addition of two Cessna 180s and a single de Havilland Chipmunk.

Early in the Kenyan emergency crews experimented with dropping bombs, consisting of a galvanised iron case filled with gelignite and nails. Bryn Elliot wrote that the two bombs tested were unsuccessful 'because of the difficulty experienced by the pilot in cutting the ropes tying them to the aircraft.' He reported that 'The Tri-Pacers were equipped with four light series bomb racks fitted below the belly slightly to the rear of the main wheels, these usually being loaded with 19lb. fragmentation bombs, smoke bombs, or phosphorous grenades.'[1]

When Jimmy Aitken joined PRAW he was in Bindura and owned this Piper PA-20-135 Pacer VP-YRV. He moved on to Cessna C180s, the first was VP-YJA and then VP-WGU. He found them to be good at short landings and take-offs. His daughter Kirsty Chatham noted her father's farm was used as a refuelling base for RhAF helicopters when they were operational in Mozambique, as the farm was right on the border. She recalled 'going to the JOC to pick him up one evening and he had been shot up which occasionally happened.'[4] (Photo by Jimmy Aitken)

When British forces attacked the Mau-Mau they would send an RAF Auster 'Sky Shout' to warn of an imminent attack, this would be followed by a KPRAW aircraft that would mark the target for the Avro Lincoln bombers that followed. Three KPRAW aircraft had been lost to ground fire by 1955. In January 1957, the Air Wing became an integral part of the Kenya Police Force. The State of Emergency ended in November 1959 and Kenya became an independent state on 12 December 1963.

A similar reserve organisation was established in Northern Rhodesia. In his *History of the Northern Rhodesia Police*,[2] Tim Wright wrote that this unit was formed in 1953 and included members from the Flying Clubs of Lusaka, Livingstone, Nkana, Ndola, Luanshya and Mufulira. As with the early members of PRAW most of the pilots in the NRPR had flown in the armed forces and used their own or flying club aircraft. 'A pilot required a valid licence and either to have logged 500 hours or a minimum of 150 hours as pilot-in-charge, having landed at 10 different aerodromes, flow three different types of aircraft and completed a 300-mile cross-country flight.'[3] There seems to be no information of when the unit ceased or if it ceased to operate. Wright commented that 'they had a short and not uneventful career and provided valuable support in a vast territory not endowed with good land communications.' [4]

Although on rare occasions aircraft owners had been approached by the BSAP for assistance it seems the Kenyan experience was the impetus for the establishment of PRAW. Kennerley noted that it was thought that two BSAP officers visited Kenya during the Mau-Mau emergency and studied the work and organisation of the Kenyan Police Air Wing. Their subsequent report recommended the formation of a similar group to support the BSAP. Force Order 213/57 of 1 July 1957 officially stated that members of the Police Reserve who were licensed pilots would undertake police flying duties as required.

Commanded by Phil Palmer of the Directorate of Civil Aviation, the founding 21 pilots, 19 observers, and 16 aircraft, were divided into two flights, Mashonaland, and Matabeleland. With the establishment of the Manicaland flight, the three provinces of the country were fully covered. By 1974 there were five flights: Manicaland, Mashonaland, Matabeleland, Midlands, and Victoria. To manage an escalating conflict the Mashonaland Flight was split up to create new flights and accommodate the additional aircraft and crew. A total of nine flights had been formed by 1979; these were: Lomagundi, Manicaland, Marandellas, Matabeleland, Mazoe Valley, Midlands, PGHQ, SALOPS and Victoria. The PGHQ flight comprised of the Unit Commander, his Deputy and a select group of instructor/examiners also known as the Flight Standards Flight. Towards the end of hostilities, John Plant took over from Phil Palmer and Bill Linfield followed as the final PRAW Commander.

For the first seven years PRAW crews assisted in the capture of criminals, transported police officers, and flew in support of police operations. Wayne Kennerley recorded that in September 1957, two aircraft were used to find a criminal on the run and in December they assisted in finding the murderer of Charles Williams of Inyati. In 1965, the available aircraft were seven Cessna 172s, six Piper Tri-Pacers, three Beech Bonanzas, three Cessna 182s, two Taylorcraft Austers, two Piper Cherokee 180s, a Cessna 210, a Luscombe Silvaire and a Cessna 180.

The Commissioner awarded commendations to Force Number 4299 Inspector Gilmour, Bulawayo Urban District, 7376 Police Reserve Pilot Brown, and 6998 Police Reserve Observer Magee, both the latter Mashonaland Flight members, for their successful apprehension of a gang of men.

On 14 August 1962, the gang attacked a police vehicle at the Shangani River in the Lupani area and released an arrested man. Inspector Gilmour oversaw the operation to recapture the released man and his helpers. Applying tactics that would in time become second nature, the PRAW crew took off before dawn and patrolled the area, looking for signs of life. An out of place cooking fire was enough of a sign to be able call in the ground based team, who were guided to the location, where they encircled and arrested 97 men.

Two pilots were awarded the MBE for outstanding services. Roy Smart, tobacco farmer, retired BSAP officer, and senior Air Wing pilot was gazetted in the New Year Honours list of 1963, as a reward and to highlight his good work. The other recipient, Bill Springer had been a member of the Police Reserve from 1954 and of the Police Reserve Air Wing since its inception in 1957 and was commander of the Manicaland flight, received his MBE on 12 June 1965. His citation read:

> Throughout his service, Police Reserve Pilot Springer has carried out the exacting duties required of him in an efficient, cheerful, and devoted manner. On numerous occasions he has shown a public-spirited attitude, not only in respect of his Air Wing duties but, also in the assistance he has rendered in flying sick and injured members of the public to hospitals from remote areas of the country. This was often done with considerable inconvenience, and expense, to himself. In all, he has made some 30 flights on such missions, usually at no cost to the people concerned.[5]

Bill ran a transport business from Chipinga and flew a wide variety of missions. These ranged from bush fire spotting, through searching for stolen vehicles, or escaped criminals to helping in a murder case. He flew around 30 medical emergency flights extracting people from remote areas across the country and transporting them to major hospitals, with one trip requiring a flight to Johannesburg.[6]

A precursor to the conflict that would ensue when Rhodesian and South African nationalists joined forces occurred in July 1967 when a large, combined force of 79 entered the country in the Victoria Falls area. They split in to two groups, with some contact with the Rhodesians it became clear a major operation was needed, comprising the RAR, RLI, 1 (Independent) Company, the Rhodesia Regiment and the BSAP, which included PRAW. On a temporary basis FAF1 operations were moved to Wankie Game Reserve's Main Camp. This was Operation Nickel, which proved to be a precursor of what was to come. Over the next month the Rhodesian forces were engaged in running battles, recorded acts of extreme bravery, and accounted for 47 insurgents, captured, or killed, for the loss of 8 killed and 14 wounded. The remaining nationalists were rounded up in Botswana and South Africa.

2

Flying with PRAW

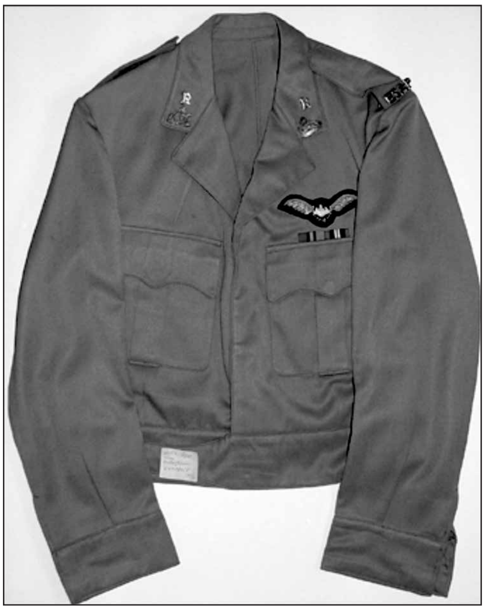
Structure

The Air Wing was part of the wider Police Reserve, a large body of field reservists, of all ages, gender, and race, trained to assist the regular force in all their duties. The command structure was decentralised and flexible.

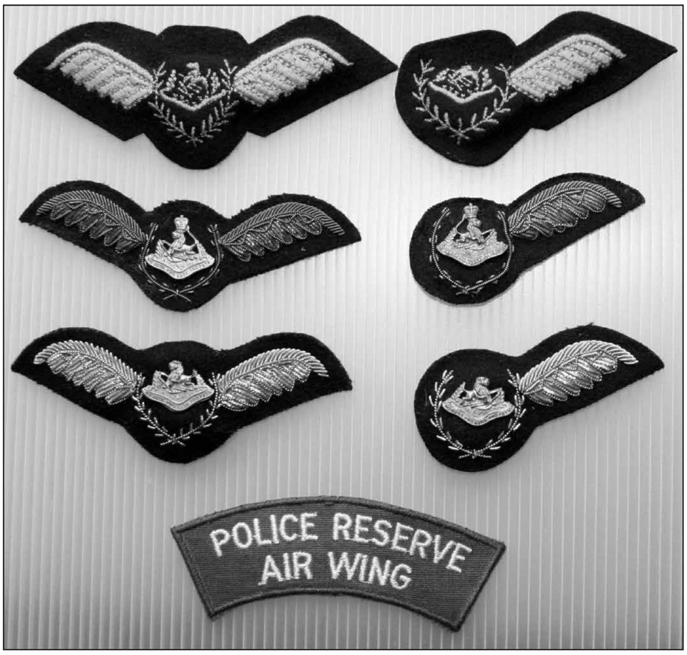
When on duty and not flying, members' dress uniform consisted of a khaki battledress style tunic comparable to that worn during World War II, with BSAP shoulder titles, collar badges with the letter 'R' (Reserve) above, worn with wings and medal ribbons, khaki trousers with cloth belt, accompanied by the standard BSAP drab cap, with badge, and brown shoes.

This uniform was worn for the first time at a parade after the 1961 Annual Exercise at Tomba Airfield, Sinoia. Casual clothes were never worn when flying unless the circumstances were so urgent that the crew were unable to change before deployment. While standard flying overalls, similar in design to those of the Air Force, were the standard issue for general flying duties, PRAW crews opted for camouflage kit when called up to fly in forward combat areas. This was a sensible alternative and would have been preferable in the event of a forced landing in hostile territory when it might have been necessary to remain concealed while awaiting rescue.

Full wings for pilots or half wings for observers were worn on the left side of the chest, above any medal ribbons. The wings came in two forms; gold wire embroidered on a black background with crown, and yellow cotton on a black background with crown. Post UDI the crown was no longer used. On the right side was the nametag embroidered in gold on a dark blue background. Kennerley notes that there were three types of shoulder titles, embroidered with 'Police Reserve Air Wing'; red on dark blue, white on dark blue and white on medium blue. Some unofficial insignia emerged, such as the SALOPS Wing patch that depicted Snoopy riding a kennel with Woodstock firing a machine gun from the rear. The



Dress Tunic ex Shelagh Anderson
This dress uniform passed on to Shelagh Anderson by Brain Bradley Copper 158 and re-tailored to fit. PRAW members did not wear the standard BSAP tunic worn by BSAP regulars, but rather their own tunic similar to the British WWII battledress tunic. The material colour differs over the years from a light khaki drill to a much darker material as with this example. On each collar is the BSAP lion insignia of an 'R', with a brass BSAP on the shoulders. Worn on the left side are the wings and medal ribbons. The ribbons shown are representative as they are of only two of Roy Anderson's awards; the one on the right is the 1939–1945 War Medal. Shelagh was awarded three medals for her PRAW service but did not serve in World War II. (Wayne Kennerley collection)



PRAW Wings and Shoulder Title
On the left are pilots' wings; yellow cotton on a black background and gold wire embroidered on a black background with a crown in the middle. The crown was omitted post UDI. On the right are the similar half wing worn by observers/gunners. Below the wings is an example of one of the three types of shoulder titles, embroidered with 'Police Reserve Air Wing.'These were available as red on dark blue, white on dark blue and white on medium blue. (Wayne Kennerley collection)

Victoria Province Flight
Pilots John Taylor, Alistair Davies and Eric Harrison with Cherokee 6 VP-WFV. Camouflage uniforms were worn on forward operational duties**.** (Photo by Bill Linfield)

Crews Pose for the Camera After an Exercise
After an exercise, PRAW crews pose for the camera. Standing left to right Dan Maxwel, John Steed, Colin Taylor and Ray du Preez in the front Eden Simon. (Photo by John Steed)

The Midlands Flight in 1978.
Left to right. Unknown RhAF officer, Marten Fuller 25578B Copper 163, D. A. Oates 13246X Copper 33, Rod Bater 24632Y Copper 164 (Flight Commander Midlands Flight), Blake Few Air Traffic Control Thornhill RhAF, Joe Kennedy 30587W Copper 166, R. A. Noel 383476 Copper 165, Earnie Parker 8324X Copper 161, Glynn Jones (Observer) Copper 167, Ron Cowl Observer. (Photo by Rod Bater)

Matabeleland Flight had two versions of their round patch, both had an aircraft silhouette in brown on a mustard background, but with 'Air Wing' in white and 'Matabeleland, Rhodesia' in black and the second version with wording 'Mat.Provs.' in black above and 'Air Wing' in white below. Unofficial slip-on epaulettes were also worn, some embroidered with 'PRAW,' or the same letters written with a felt-tip pen.

A commander was appointed for each flight, which consisted of about 15 aircraft, duties were rostered by PRAW HQ. There were no ranks, and no saluting but the crew were treated as officers. Pilot and broadcaster, John Steed wrote that everyone was on first name terms, from the head of the army to a rifleman or 'troopie.' He felt that this led to 'a clubby camaraderie' accompanied by a demand for high standards of conduct both in the air and on the ground.

Call signs were allocated to each pilot – appropriately 'Copper', followed by a number range allocated to each flight, with 01 and 02 reserved for the Unit Commander and Deputy Commander respectively. Pilots were assigned different 'Copper' numbers if they moved location or flight. Numbers were only allocated or changed following approval from PGHQ and Kennerley notes that by the late 1970s, numbers had reached the 200s.

Use of commercial, flying club and private aircraft was paid for by the government by the flying hour. The cost per flying hour of hiring aircraft was calculated to cover fuel, maintenance, and other normal running costs but the compensation was never totally adequate. Standby time, maintenance and fuel costs were covered by the owners. Later, when on weekly calls ups, the air force refuelled the aircraft.

Police Reserve Order 45/N/1 of 1979 noted the following hire prices in Rhodesian dollars

Type of Aircraft	Private Category Rate	Commercial Category Rate
Cessna 172	$32.50	$35.50
Beech Bonanza	$52.25	$54.25
Cessna 310	$92.00	$96.50

A nominal daily rate was paid to on duty crews, along with insurance cover for injury and aircraft damage. In the late 1970s, pilots were paid $7 per day. At this point, they were operating on weeklong deployments.

People and Planes

Many of the crew were farmers or businessmen who owned aircraft to enable then to traverse the country. Others bought or hired aircraft to serve in the Air Wing. Several of the founders were experienced

B.S.A. Police Air Wing, Flight Commanders Conference, 15 October 1970
Back row: Superintendent R. Townsend, Chief Inspector R. Thompson, PRP C. Bickle, Superintendent J. Day.
Third row: Inspector D. LeGuern, PRP P. Scales, Superintendent J. Neale, Superintendent V. Phelan, PRP A. Browner.
Second row: Superintendent D. Jones, PRP G. York, PRP J. Manning, PRP C. Boltt PRP D. Howell.
Front row: PRP H. Gowan, WCmdr O. Penton, Superintendent J. Collins, Superintendent A. Rich. (Photo, Wayne Kennerley)

Back row: PRO L. J. De Jongh, Inspector M Cross, PRO R Dean, PRO N. B. Pritchard, PRP P. F. Church, PRO S. Daykin, PRP H. Challoner, Inspector R. Will (i/c Nyamapanda), Inspector M. Taylor (i/c Mrewa)
Front row: Superintendent R. B. Isemonger (OC N.E. Border), PRP P. R. Bell, Chief Superintendent C. C. MacPhail (OC Marandellas District), PRP H. Chisnall (Flight Commander), Superintendent T. Wilson (Superintendent PR and S Mashonaland), PRP P. Grobler, Inspector D. Keens (i/c Mtoko). (Wayne Kennerley collection)

wartime pilots, or came from some military background, and others came from commercial aviation companies and flying clubs. For the farmers and flying club members qualifying was time-consuming and costly. It took many months, if not years, of flying part time as an amateur, to build up the basic flying experience required to be considered for PRAW.

Rhodesian born William 'Bill' MacDonald DFC, educated at Milton School, Bulawayo joined the RAF in Kenya. On 17 December 1942, while serving with 33 Squadron in the western desert, he used his bush-learnt sense of direction to guide armoured cars deep into the desert to rescue downed airmen.

He was awarded the DFC on 12 December 1943 for seven confirmed 'kills' and numerous ground attack successes. This is his sortie report for 24 March 1944, at which time he was serving with the No 145 Squadron RAF.

> I was leading a section of 4 a/c at 11,000' when CHANGER reported 30+ E/A approaching Cassino at 15,000'. I climbed to 14,000' and approached the E/A head on. One section dived below us – all of them FW 190s – and two sections of ME 109s and FW 190s passed over us. In all about 12+ a/c. I turned into a section of ME 109s to starboard and they immediately climbed into sun. I followed, my No.2 with me, and fired on the rear ME 109 from 200–300 yards astern while in a climb without seeing results. The E/A then turned over on his back and went down in a dive. I made the same manoeuvre, followed him down and got in another burst from 100–150 yds. astern in a dive seeing strikes on the fuselage and wings then a large piece flew off the starboard wing and another off the fuselage. The E/A continued in his dive and crashed into the ground at G.7822. The action was witnessed by W/O A.S. Martyn my No.2. I claim 1x ME109F or G destroyed, and used 120 x .303, 40 x 20mm.[1]

It was noted in the March 1969 edition of *The Outpost Magazine* that in 1946, with the rank of Squadron Leader, MacDonald returned

PRP Ronald 'Ronnie' Pascoe, Copper 05 of the Mazoe Valley Flight in Cessna 180 VP-YRP. (Photo, Gerry van Tonder)

to Rhodesia and started tobacco farming in the Arcturus and Sinoia Districts. He owned Tiger VP-YOI and Cessna 172 VP-YUG. In 1969 Bill, Copper 12, and his observer Dickie Boltt were awarded the Commissioner's Special Commendation in recognition of their tenacity of purpose, skill and courage while on a rescue mission.

On the 4 January 1941, a Hawker Hardy of No 237 (Rhodesia) Squadron, operating over Eritrea, was hit by anti-aircraft gunfire. Air gunner Sergeant Ken Murrell was hit in the knee by a piece of shrapnel, which he removed with a screwdriver. He found that small fires had broken out around him, that he then beat at with his with his hands until his pilot Ron Christie could land, when the fires were extinguished. For this action, he was awarded a DFM on 11 February 1941. Later he re-mustered as a pilot. Post war he become the Chief Pilot of Rhodesia United Air Carriers (RUAC) and spent time with the Department of Civil Aviation and flying Dakotas for Hunting Clan. The Pat Judson Trophy was awarded in 1975 to Murrell for meritorious service to Rhodesia in the air. In PRAW service, he flew with Roy Smart out of Lesbury Estate Rusape, which was a favourite checkpoint for trainee pilots on cross county exercises.

Fellow RUAC pilot Stan Murray earned his DFC in a daring rescue attempt. He had joined the SAAF in 1937 and by mid–1940 Lieutenant Stanley Willam Murray had been posted to East Africa. Here he transferred to a Fairey Battle, crewed by pilot and air gunner/radio operator, and the bomb aimer/observer; it was notoriously under armed with a single 0.303inch Browning machine gun in the starboard wing and a Vickers 'K' gun mounted at the rear of the long, 'glasshouse' cockpit.

Mitch Stirling wrote that:

> by 4 April 1941, Lieutenant Murray had completed 17 raids against Italian forces in Abyssinia and Somaliland

and that

> it was his 18th raid on 19 April 1941 that earned him the Distinguished Flying Cross. While he was bombing motor transport at Dessie, on the main road north of Addis Ababa to Asmara, his flight commander's aircraft was hit. Captain Britz, with observer Major van Pittins, force landed and crashed at nearby Kombolcha aerodrome.[2]

The Rand Daily mail reported, 'In the face of extremely accurate enemy fire at short range, Lieutenant Murray landed at the aerodrome in a gallant attempt to rescue his flight commander and the observer. He only desisted when he was signalled by the flight commander to take off again.[3]

He is remembered by Mitch Stirling as:

> this quiet, unassuming gentleman mainly for his skills behind the controls of a Rhodesia United Air Carriers Beech Baron, or the Queen Air 80 that he flew for over 1.5 million kilometres for Lonrho – the equivalent of 36 times around the world. He was also a very skilful fly-fisherman who spent many hours on terra firma during day stops around the country, perfecting the art of tying his own flies. He was an inordinately modest man.[4]

On 30 December 1967 three C Squadron (Rhodesian) Special Air Service operators were flown into Zambia by a PRAW pilot to sabotage ZIPRA's Lusaka headquarters. The pilot was ex-British Army paratrooper Peter Scales, a highly experienced military man. He had served in the Somerset Light Infantry, then in tanks before training as a paratrooper. He jumped during Operation Overlord with K Section Signals, 5th Parachute Brigade of 6 Airborne Division, and then in Operation Market Garden with J Section Signals, 1st Parachute Brigade, 1 Airborne Division. He was wounded on both occasions. For the remainder of the war, he served in Norway and Denmark before being sent to serve in the Far East in Singapore and finally Jakarta.

In early 1947 he was on his way to Tasmania to farm fruit, when on a six-week layover in Cape Town, he decided to visit his parents in Southern Rhodesia. At the age of 22, he signed on to the Southern Rhodesia Staff Corps and during the Suez Crisis, served in Egypt with the Rhodesian African Rifles. He was attached to the Kings African Rifles in Nyasaland in 1955, and then left to join the BSAP in which he served until 1959, when he resigned to start his own business. Immediately after the war he had learnt to fly on a Tiger

Luscombe Silvair, 15 February 1972 PRP Peter Scales flew this Luscombe 8E Silvaire for about 10 years from October 1965. Here it is at Mount Hampden on 15 February 1972. He later sold the aircraft, and it was exported to South Africa as ZS-JKW. (Robin D W Norton)

1965 model Cessna 180 VP-YYO owned and flown by Peter Scales. During his time with PRAW, he owned and or flew VP-WCS Cessna C210, VP-YYK Cessna C310, VP-WCV Stinson Stationwagon ST75, VP-YJY Luscombe Silvaire, and VP-YTV Cessna C180. He operated a limited production fixed undercarriage Cessna C336, push pull, A2-BGI. A report was made to the Botswana authorities about this aircraft being used by the Reserve Air Wing. (Photo by Julian Scales)

Moth with Marshalls in Cambridge. While serving in the BSAP, he renewed his licence at Salisbury's Belvedere Airfield and began instructing pilots of the newly formed Reserve Air Wing from the then Mount Hampden Airport. Although not an official designation, he was effectively the BSAP staff pilot and flew throughout Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland during the break-up of the Federation, while also setting up a radio school for African soldiers. Naturally when he left the BSAP in 1959, he signed on to the Reserve Air Wing.

It is unclear if the 1967 flight into Zambia in support of SAS Operation Sculpture was an official PRAW flight, but it was certainly the ultimate courier operation. Flying a Cessna U206 VP-YYB, with false registration, Peter spent some time around Bulawayo practising landing on a darkened airfield. On the night of the operation, his target was a private airfield 65 kilometres north of Lusaka, which he had to locate using only maps, a compass, and a stopwatch. He glided onto the field with full flaps to reduce detection; in any case, his arrival was covered by a loud party at the airfield clubhouse. The operators had an anxious wait as Peter raised the flaps so as to allow them to disembark and meet their local agent.

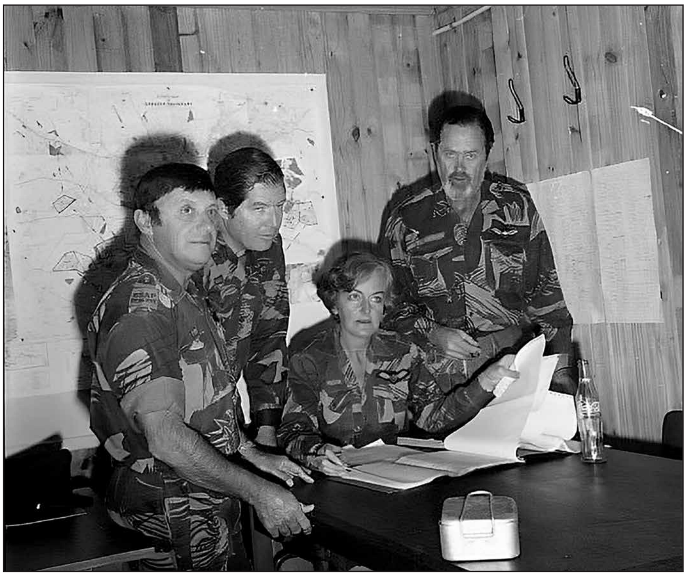
The operation was a washout and the three SAS operators made their way to the apron of Lusaka International Airport for pick up. There was another anxious wait as Peter was 30 minutes late. To screen this arrival, he tucked in behind Zambian Airways BAC 1-11-205 9J-RCI. All eyes were on the new airliner that had been delivered 15 days earlier and no one notice the departure of a small plane in the dark.

From 1970 to 1974, Peter was the commander of the Matabeleland Flight and like several PRAW members spent long periods on 'call-ups', flying various army personnel between operational areas, and acting as a 'telstar' for Rhodesian forces on the ground. Peter joined the South African Air Force in 1975 and served there until he retired in 1980, but ever the military man he joined the Natal Mounted Rifles (NMR) in Durban, as a reservist specialising in signals.

A Fairey Barracuda Mk III of FAA 815 Naval Squadron was John Plant's first operational aircraft. He went on to fly the Blackburn Firebrand TF MK V with 827 Naval Squadron and ended his navy days on helicopters in the Pacific supporting the British nuclear tests. Emigrating to Rhodesia with his wife Sylvia and two children, on a helicopter contract, he eventually took ownership of Techair who were often called out by the BSAP as they were based at Mount Hampden and were very accessible. John joined PRAW early in 1966, later progressing to Flight Commander of the Standards Flight and then in 1979 to become PRAW Unit Commander.

Flying ran in Wally Barton's family. His father had flown SE5As with the RFC over France. Leaving school in 1941, he joined the SAAF, obtained his wings, and was then seconded to the RAF. Following advanced training, he was posted to No.515 Squadron equipped with the De Havilland Mosquito. After the war, he returned to Rhodesia to farm. He did not fly again until 1963 when farmers in the Centenary East area arranged a Techair instructor to give flying lessons once a week. After a five-hour refresher, he obtained his PPL. He imported a Cessna 182 VP-YXZ and transferred his military commitments to PRAW to become a member of the Mazoe Valley Flight commanded by Bill Ludgater.

PRP Shelagh Anderson in uniform, with wings and shoulder unit identification. (Photo by Shelagh Anderson)



Shelagh Anderson working through duty schedules at Mount Hampden Salisbury Typical PRAW Planning Meeting photo.
Left to Right: Isaac 'Zac' Bondi Copper 155, Ernest 'Ernie' Burke, Sheila Anderson, and Roy Anderson. (Photo, Keith Holshausen)

Brian van Buuren besides his Piper Tri-Pacer VP-YLE. This was replaced with a Cessna T.210K Turbo Centurion ZS-JUM. (Photo by Brian Van Buuren)

The only woman operational pilot in the Rhodesian War was Shelagh Anderson. It was 1959 and British born Shelagh Ward had decided to explore the world. At the age of 28, she purchased a ticket for the 26-hour flight to Salisbury, Rhodesia. A year later she met and married businessman Roy Anderson, a South African seconded to the Royal Navy during World War II, who moved to Southern Rhodesia when Apartheid was legislated. Faced with another conflict, he decided to make himself useful and learn to fly specifically to join PRAW. Shelagh and her friend Dr Meg Stubbs, who was not in PRAW, enrolled in 1972 on a month's intensive flying course, after which they were both awarded their flying licences. The two women built up their hours flying to remote clinics where Dr Stubbs was responsible for helping rural women.

Roy was flying for PRAW as Copper 151 in his Piper PA-32-260 Cherokee Six ZS-ELE and Shelagh was assigned to PGHQ as Flight Tasking Officer. It was some time before commanders permitted her to fly safe courier and minor casevac missions. Between flights, she continued scheduling PRAW pilots and her battle to become fully operational. There were the standard objections – that she was a woman, conditions were too tough or there were no suitable facilities at bush airfields. It took four years before she was allocated the same flights as the men, with call sign Copper 165. While working to full operational status Shelagh became the first woman in Africa to attain a rating to carry out paradrops.

Kenyan born, and fluent in Swahili and Kikuyu, 14-year-old Bob Fernandes flew as an observer with the Kenyan Police Air Wing. Positioned where the rear seat used to be in a Tri- Pacer, he would drop supplies and notes for the forces in the Aberdare Forests fighting the Mau-Mau rebellion. While working for an import-export company he decided to learn to fly with Wilken Air and save the long road trips required in East Africa. He later moved to South Africa and continued flying for business and pleasure.

He relocated to Rhodesia in the 1970s and began his service with the RhAF Reserve as ground staff serving two-week stints as assistant controller at a FAF. He then enrolled with PRAW and flew as observer for Mike Simpson. There is a record of Bob completing what is expected to have been a PRAW test on 19 March 1977 in a Piper Arrow belonging to a flying school based at Nduna airfield. Using a rented Cessna 172 VP-WDB, he flew courier and Telstar flights for six months until he attended an aerial reconnaissance course at Thornhill Air Base. This was followed with further training at New Sarum and Centenary.

From 1964 Brian van Buuren served with the Field Reserve and then with PATU (Police Anti-Terrorist Unit) in the Umtali area. He had always wanted to fly and formed a syndicate with his farming neighbours Rupert Hilderbrand and Dave Wiggins to purchase a Piper Tri-Pacer VP-YLE. Brian and Rupert were trained on the farm airfield by Byrne Gardener. The two men passed their licences in 1974 and Brian flew for PRAW from 8 January 1975 to 4 January 1998. To balance PRAW numbers across the region he flew for the Chipinga flight based at FAF6. Brian and Rupert purchased their own aircraft and the Tri-Pacer was sold. Brian's logbook records that in some months he flew over 100 hours for PRAW using Cessna 210 Turbo Centurion ZS-JUM.

Lieutenant John Robins Watson, No 114 Squadron, SAAF, was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal on 22 July 1945. The citation notes the high number of sorties flown, his devotion to duty and how he contributed to the fighting efficiency of the squadron. This same citation could apply to his voluntary service with the PRAW. He built a runway on his farm, known as Makado Ranch, in the far south-west of the country, from which he flew a Piper

Lieutenant John Robins Watson, DFC, No 114 Squadron, SAAF The award of a DFC was published in *The London Gazette* of Tuesday, 22 May 1945 and read 'This officer has participated in very many sorties, involving armed reconnaissances at night. He has at all times displayed outstanding devotion to duty and has on numerous occasions led attacks with great skill. His excellent work and fine example have contributed materially to the fine fighting efficiency of the squadron.' (Photo by Andrew Watson)

Cherokee PA-28-235 ZS-FMW, to manage his earth moving and fencing contracts and on PRAW duties.

Using the call sign Copper 192, Watson provided an air ambulance service for accident and landmine victims. On one memorable flight, even though he had diverted from Bulawayo to the closer Gwanda Airport his pregnant passenger gave birth on the wing of the aircraft after a fairly urgent landing [this would have been a low wing aeroplane with the passengers needing to walk along the walkway on the wing close to the fuselage. It is probable that they got her out of a rather cramped cabin and laid her on the wing, which was probably preferable to a dusty airfield]. It was this flight that seemed to have led to Robin's nickname 'Doc'. However, as Dave Ward advised, 'Robin was not addressed as Doc by anyone who did not know him or was not an associate. Robin Watson was next to me in a night contact as he insisted on helping us when another ranch was getting a "rev" [attacked]. He was Mr. Watson to me.'[5]

In 1977, Robin had flown to Ironwood, Ian Smith's second ranch, which was under development. When he returned to his aircraft, he was devastated to find that ZIPRA insurgents had torched the Cherokee and it lay in ruins. He then purchased a Beechcraft Bonanza V35A VP-WHM. Flying now as Copper128 'Doc' recalled a Cherokee he had seen three years earlier in Luderitz, South-West Africa (Namibia) which had been armed with two AK-47s and a chute to drop grenades. He went on to fit his aircraft in a similar manner. The Bonanza saw a fair amount of action and Robin was awarded the Meritorious Conduct Medal. After the conflict ended the wing strengthening, ammunition bays and guns were removed and the hole in the floor closed. The aircraft was later reregistered Z-WHM (Zimbabwe) and was sold to a new owner in South Africa after Robin died in 1990. More recently, it was sold to an American owner but was damaged in transit, and only the fuselage is extant.

Bill Linfield learnt to fly privately while serving as a regular in the BSAP. His first training flight was at Mashonaland Flying Club in their Piper Cub VP-YFT on 17 January 1967. Regular BSAP members were not accepted to fly in the Air Wing and so on retirement, with experience of air rallies, flying club activities, and a commercial licence, he joined PRAW in 1977. While pursuing a career in corporate and charter work, he saw extensive service during the bush war. Following the cessation of hostilities, he, along with others, decided to continue to fly in support of the police in their now civilian role, providing casevac, transport and search and rescue services. He was appointed Commander of the unit in 1982, retiring 20 years later.

> I was always interested in flying and wanted to join the Rhodesian Air Force, but I was medically unfit because I was deaf in my starboard ear,[6] wrote Gerry Cleveland. It was his passion for radio that led to him flying. Following an apprenticeship in the UK, he returned to Rhodesia to work for Marconi. He also joined the Police Reserve, where he was assigned to look after the radios in the wartime armoured cars used for night patrols. An opportunity arose to join Volunteers for Advanced Training, where he received instruction in map reading, tracking, fire and movement, living off the bush, and the use of a variety of weapons. Part of the tough selection process saw the candidates cut out an LZ for a PRAW aircraft. Those that passed joined PATU, where in sticks, or units, of four their job was to patrol the country's borders.

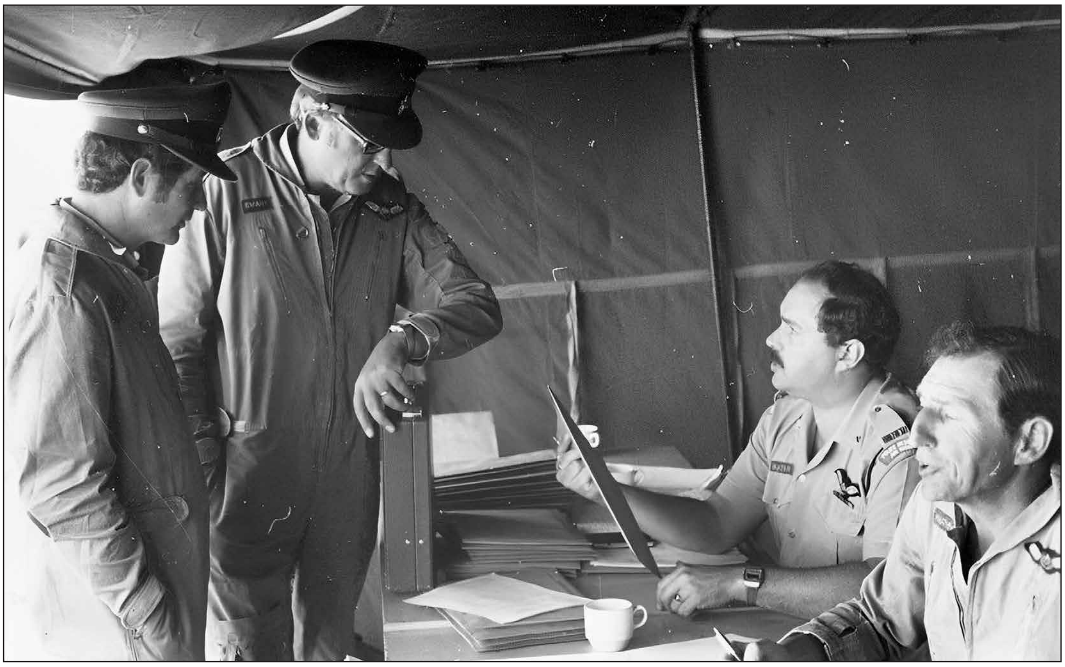
In 1964, Gerry moved to Skywork to install avionics and had his first flight with an instructor. He restored a Link Trainer that was subsequently incorporated into the company's training programme. After he had attained his pilot's licence, he was appointed as the avionics inspector for the DCA, and was encouraged to train for his commercial licence. To cover the costs, he exchanged flying hours for night school instruction in radio and navigation systems.

Copper 34 was Dr Allan Abrey, a Salisbury veterinarian who joined the Air Wing in 1968 with his Mooney VP-YXF, which he had purchased in February 1965. After a time working in the USA he returned in 1974 and purchased Cherokee 6-300 ZS-ZIL, which he wrote 'was a much more useful aircraft for PRAW and one that Wing Commanders at the JOC's were always delighted to see arrive.'[7] His call sign was changed to Copper 168 as a member of the Salisbury HQ Flight. The Cherokee had a good payload, and the seats could be removed easily, which allowed two stretchers on flights. Abrey noted that:

> the large loading door in the rear facilitated loading stretchers and other bulky items. Apart from casevac and courier work, I was involved in flights to look for stolen cattle, reconnaissance and the familiarisation of newly arrived army and police personnel to an area. Often the latter flights were a waste of time unless the passengers were used to light aircraft flying, as invariably they would choose to fly when it was hot and bumpy at low altitudes, so often after a short time, the passengers were more concerned about retaining their breakfasts than the terrain below.
>
> During the last 18 months of the war, I also owned a half share in a Piper Aztec ZS-JWK which I brought into the Airwing and used it for VIP courier flights. The half share partner was Mike Standish-White, not in PRAW but a renowned orthopaedic surgeon who saved many lives.[8]

Between 1974 and 1980, Allan Abrey logged 2,165 hours many of them on flying for PRAW.

It was while employed as an assistant on a tobacco farm that Rod Bater joined the BSAP Field Reserve in 1963 with force number 1685F. In 1968, he transferred to the A Reserve as a Patrol Officer driving B cars with Traffic Branch. He was then assigned to Gwelo



PRP Rod Bater National Training Officer, second right and Inspector Pringle, Member in Charge of PRAW at PGHQ, second left, discuss training at a bush airfield. (Photo, Rod Bater)

Charge Office as a 2 bar Reserve Patrol Officer. Early in 1978, he gained a Full Instructors rating with Phil Palmer of the DCA. Palmer, Unit Commander of the Police Reserve Air Wing also passed Rod's Air Wing entrance flight test. Palmer introduced Rod to Tony Browne the Flight Commander of Midlands Flight in Gwelo. As a result, Rod became a member of the Midlands Flight based at Thornhill Air Force Base from where he operated as Copper 164. John Plant, the new unit commander of PRAW, invited him to assist in the annual training weekends and to conduct the annual flight tests for the PRAW members. He also organised all the training for Midlands Flight and Flight Tests.

In 1979, on the creation of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia he left the BSAP but re-joined shortly after with a new force number of 24632Y, and was appointed Midlands Flight Commander. From 1981, he served in the Z.R.P. Police Air Wing as a Police Pilot in the PG HQ Flight, and as the National Training Officer.

Bob Needham and his family arrived in Rhodesia from Kenya on 3 March 1971, and set up the Matabeleland Flying School at the old wartime airfield of Induna, Bulawayo, Matabeleland Province. His wife, Phoebe Ann, ran the business, while he taught flying or flew charter flights.

Bob learned to fly at Croydon Airport, South London, then instructed at Biggin Hill, before relocating to Kenya and flying for various companies. Not able to extend his work permit, the options were to return to the UK or find somewhere else to work in Africa. The family decided to head south.

In late 1972, he volunteered for the BSAP as a Field Reservist. Armed with a Short Lee-Enfield .303 and 5 rounds, in his blue uniform trousers, he would be one of a group of European and African reservists sent out to patrol the streets and surrounds of Bulawayo.

Having served as a National Service signaller in Germany with the RAF, as part of the British Army of the Rhine, he requested a transfer from the Field Reserve to the BSAP Signals Branch as a Radio Operator. In February 1974, he was called up for a two-week deployment at Centenary. It was a baptism of fire for Bob. His training had consisted of a rudimentary overview of procedures from the outgoing operator, before he found that his station was the centre of a hunt for insurgents who had murdered the Fletchers, a local farmer and his wife.

It was after this that he realised that his current commercial pilot licence and instructor rating made him eligible to be considered for PRAW and he submitted a transfer request. His acceptance flight on 11 June 1974 was signed off by Peter Scales. Matabeleland Flying School would hire out to PRAW pilots, a four-seater Cessna 172 VP-WDB, Cherokee 180 VP-WFR, Cherokee 235 (260) VP-YKD and a six-seater Cessna 206 ZS-GBL. Only VP-WDB, had some protection from surface-to-air Strella missiles. It was painted with a dull olive green non-reflective, anti-radiation paint and had fitted a heat shroud to deflect the heat from the exhaust.

The last PRAW flight for Bob was on 22 February 1980 with a trip to Madlambudzi with Assistant Commissioner Mike Reeves on board. The family flew to the UK via Kenya, and about a year later emigrated to Australia.

Called up for intake 112 in 1970, Mike Gardner served with the Rhodesia Regiment. Flying for Matabeleland Flying School, he joined PRAW in 1974. He transferred to a Salisbury based unit when he took up a position with Techair in July of the same year and flew their Cherokee 180s, Cherokee 6 and Piper Aztecs as well as Buster Brown's Cessna 206. He left Rhodesia in 1978 to fly in South-West Africa for a year and on his return, he joined 7 Squadron Rhodesian Air Force until his retirement in April 1980 with the rank of Flight Lieutenant.

New Zealander Peter Anderson arrived in Rhodesia in 1969 to take up a position as an aerial top dresser in the Triangle area. He worked there for two years before returning to New Zealand. He found the working conditions less than ideal and decided to return to Rhodesia and set up a floatplane business on Lake Kariba, providing flights for tourists and services to other businesses operating on the lake.

Peter arrived in Durban, South Africa, where he applied for, and was granted, a licence to operate an aircraft on Lake Kariba. Cessna 186 ZS-JKX, fitted with a conventional undercarriage, was purchased, and ferried from Louisiana to South Africa and then on to Rhodesia. The floats were shipped to South Africa by sea and transported by road to Salisbury. Pete flew the Cessna to Charles Prince Airport where the floats were fitted. The aircraft's wings were removed, and the Cessna was transported by road to Lake McIlwaine, where the wings were reattached, and Pete's adventure begun.

His business, Lake Air, was popular and became part of the Kariba scene. Tourists enjoyed flying in a floatplane to lakeside lodges, game viewing from the air, and epic trips down the length of the lake to Victoria Falls. Here Pete would circle the Falls and then land on the smooth water found four and a half miles above the cataracts. He would then taxi to the mooring-buoy at Old Drift Lodge, where his passengers would disembark. This was the exact place that, between May 1948 and November 1950, British Overseas

Reservists throughout the BSAP made important contributions, here Field Reservists Joyce Walsh, Pat Taylor (the Headmaster of Karoi School), a regular officer and Group Leader Peter Walsh are hard at work in the Karoi HQ. (BSAP Regimental Association)

Airways Corporation (BOAC), Short S.45 Solent class flying boats would land and moor, for an overnight stop. For the airline’s passengers the Falls stop was exciting and a favourite on the four and a half day ‘Springbok Service’ from Southampton to Vaal Dam, south of Johannesburg.

Contrary to popular legend, it was not Pete but a shareholder at the start of Lake Air, Andy Van Niekirk, a PRAW observer who ran a kapenta fishing business. Pete set up a business to farm freshwater crayfish. After losing virtually all the first imported stock, he managed to build a business that saw the crayfish sold as delicacies in good restaurants.

As the war intensified, Pete found that he was engaged full time in working for the government, sometimes flying up to 100 hours a month. Major-General Peter Wall proposed using the seaplane as his ‘boat’ for the annual Tiger Fishing Tournament, but the organisers deemed that an unfair advantage. As Copper 42 of the Lomagundi Flight, Pete was tasked with a great number of reconnaissance flights, particularly along the Zambian border. On one occasion, he even came under fire from the Zambian side of the lake and his aircraft was hit near the tail by a single round.

Chris Thorne, Copper 15, grew up in Rhodesia and after completing Gwebi Course 19 in 1969, he moved to Zambia in 1970 to farm. Distances were so great, and roads so poor, that an aircraft was the most efficient method of transport. Chris purchased a Reims 172F, and proceeded to replace the four cylinder Continental with an Avon conversion four cylinder Lycoming 180hp and variable pitch propeller. He returned to Rhodesia in 1976, and sold the Reims to set up a farm in Bindura. He joined PATU but transferred to PRAW after he purchased Cessna 180H N9013M, which post 1980 was registered Z-WMR. Chris joined the Mazoe Flight under the command of Bill Ludgater, who was followed as commander by Micky Anthony. Chris flew about 500 hours for PRAW and in all, up to 2008, he accumulated 1,700 flying hours.

Not a member of PRAW but a voice and person familiar to many PRAW pilots was Mimi (Pamela) Cawood. She went to college in Bulawayo so that she could work as a signaller in the BSAP Police Station at Beltbridge, where she was assigned the call sign 303 (three zero three). Her routine was to walk to the station at 0600 hours, where she would carry out a roll call of all farmers in the area who were on the Agric Alert system. She would check that they were all safe, and afterwards go to the radio room and contact the Scouter Bases and Relay Stations in the area via a VHF radio. These bases and stations were manned by small groups of BSAP personnel, were located in remote areas, and were tasked with providing intelligence and extended communications. A daily sitrep was compiled and sent via telex to ZEF 3 (Bulawayo HQ). Once everyone had been contacted, Mimi would update the maps in the Ops Room, using different coloured pins to indicate contacts, land mines, ambushes, and sightings. It was here that PRAW pilots gathered for briefings.

On a weekly basis, she called all the farmers and ranchers in the area to ensure they had sufficient stocks of avtur and avgas to supply the PRAW and helicopter pilots operating over their lands. Mimi’s quarters were closer to the station than those of the Member in Charge, and in emergencies, the night duty Sergeant would knock on her door, give her two minutes to dress before they ran to the station for a situation briefing.

It was common in these outlying areas for people to travel together for safety or where possible find an empty place on transiting aircraft. On one occasion Rhodesian Army officer Don Price, arranged for Mimi to fly with him in a PRAW aircraft flown by Len Roberts (Copper 119) to her parents’ farm. Not long after becoming airborne, an army unit called for air support and Don instructed Len to divert to the contact area. Don took up the position of gunner and was firing the Browning machine gun when it jammed. He ordered Mimi to take a ramrod, and with him holding her legs, she managed to stretch out and clear the blockage with the rod. During the attack, the aircraft took two hits. On landing, Mimi found that her legs had ‘turned to jelly’ and her father had to carry her from the plane.

When flying with Robin Watson over the Mtetengwe TTL, Mimi’s job was to drop pamphlets to advise insurgents to hand themselves and their weapons in at assembly points as part of the settlement amnesty. She was so engrossed in pushing the paperwork out of the window that she was terrified when she heard several thuds and bangs at the front of the aircraft. They had flown into a flock of Quelea birds. As she noted, ‘the Voice of 303 was not only confined to the radio room.’[9]

Training

Before being accepted into the Wing, a pilot had to have logged a minimum of 200 hours flying time. Initially night flying was not encouraged but the pilots of the Matabeleland Flight became proficient at flying in the dark and landing at remote, unlit, airstrips. As demand on the unit increased, every PRAW pilot was required to hold a night rating. Each new member served a nine-month probation and if successful would be tested by the unit commander. This was followed by a rigorous flight test, conducted by an instructor of the Flight Standards Wing. Once certified for operations the pilots would be included on the crew duty roster held at Police Commission General Headquarters and circulated to Flight Commanders, who would assign tasks to the pilots. The flying test was repeated annually, and regular exercises were carried out with local police and police reserves. The minutes from a meeting of the Matabeleland Flight reminded members that they had an hour a month to use on training flights. They were warned though, ‘to use their hour purposely and gain experience from it rather than doing a quick swan around the outskirts of Bulawayo.[10]

The first official training exercise was conducted for Mashonaland and Manicaland in May 1961. Where according to the July issue of *The Outpost*

> more than £44.000 worth of aircraft assembled at Mount Hampden on Saturday, 27th May. Austers, Tri-Pacers, Cessnas and Bonanzas, all owned by pilots of the Police Reserve Air Wing. There was much activity there, where a radio control was set up, and also at Inkomo, where main control was installed. At 12.30 p.m. everyone was introduced to each other at the Police Club and at 1 p.m., 80 people sat down to a lunch, when the Deputy Commissioner, Mr. K. Flower, welcomed the crews, ground staff and members of the Women's Police Reserve.[11]

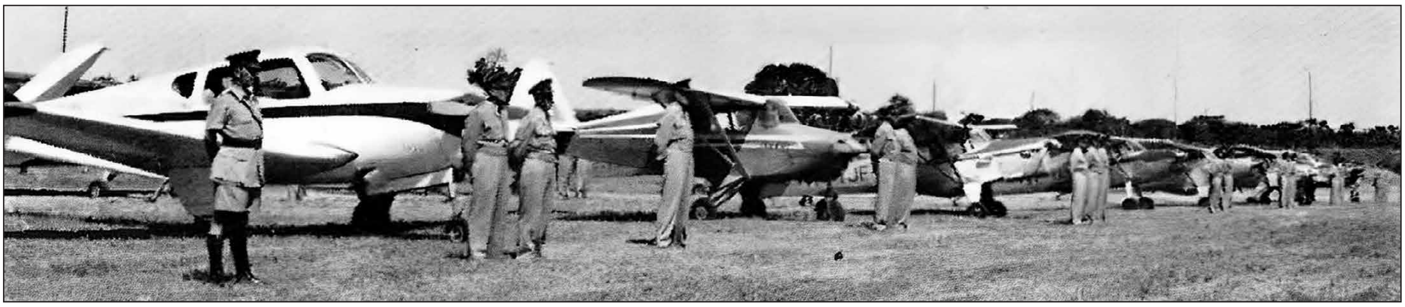
On the Sunday, it was an early start, with briefing at 0515 hours and first take off at 0700 hours. The Police magazine reported that the

> exercise consisted of a navigation course lasting 40 minutes, followed by a series of set pieces over Inkoma, then back to Mount Hampden. Radio control at Mount Hampden was operated by two members of the Women's Police Reserve, whilst the person responsible for pre-flight briefing and prompt dispatch of aircraft was Police Reserve Pilot Rex. Control at Inkomo was manned by eight members of the Women's Reserve under the command of Police Reserve Pilot Palmer, who was responsible for the flight discipline of all crews after they left Mount Hampden.
>
> On the ground at Inkomo, some five miles from control, was Yellow 1, a truck manned by crews who were to fly in the afternoon. Three miles away was Blue 1, a second truck similarly manned, plus two members of the Women's Reserve. A mile away south was a band of insurgents. Ten minutes before take-off the pilot and crew were called to the control tower at Mount Hampden and handed a flight plan and log, a list of the ground/air emergency panel code, a description of ground-to-air signals, a bomb (a mealie meal in a plastic bag) and a message-dropping bag.
>
> This was the first indication the crews had of what they were expected to do. The flight plan gave them a course to the first beacon, after which they were on their own. They had to find and identify four farms by means of the homestead identification sign and they had also to interpret various signals displayed next to the identification sign by means of the panel code. This signal was changed for every aircraft. Once the navigation course was concluded the aircraft was directed to Yellow 1 and radio contact between truck and aircraft was established. The crew were asked to read back the meanings of the signs they had seen displayed at the various farms (a check to see that they had been there), after which they had to drop a message to the truck.
>
> Accuracy here varied but averaged about 75 yards. The aircraft was then directed to Blue 1 and told to bomb it; one aircraft overshot by a mile, but on the whole it wasn't bad. The crew was then told to fly one mile south and find a gang of insurgents, after which they had to direct the truck to the mob. This was done successfully by most crews.
>
> Once this exercise was completed, the aircraft was sent back to Mount Hampden – a total flying time of 1 hour 40 minutes. Some crews took as much as 2 hours 15 minutes, others as little as 1 hour 10 minutes, depending on efficiency and speed of the aircraft. Altogether 11 aircraft took part and some 34 crew members were exercised.[12]

The following May, all members of the Wing were included in three days of training with far more challenging exercises. The events of the weekend were covered in the July 1962 edition of *The Outpost*:

> When Copper 14 landed at Tomba airstrip with but enough fuel left for seven minutes' flying, Phil Palmer and Paul Rex, the two Flight Commanders, breathed a sigh of relief. The rest of the crews present at Sinoia that Friday did likewise, but their sighs were tinged with traces of admiration for a rescue operation, which had a professional touch about it.
>
> Wiggins in his Auster had been hemmed in by bad weather which was gradually forcing him farther north away from any airstrip. Roy Smart's Bonanza, (VP-YGZ) being the fastest aircraft on view, was despatched to dig him out. This rescue act was necessary, for without instruments Wiggins was unable to clear the "clag." Piloted by Ken Murrell, who

Roy Smart MBE
VP-YGZ Beech 35 Bonanza CN D 202 Redhill (EGKR) UK England in 1962. Owned and flown by Roy Smart MBE. It was the first aircraft to operate as Copper 159, when it was used to develop radio compatibility between various forces. (Photo by Ian M MacDonald)



PRAW parade at the June 1962 Air Wing training weekend held at the Sinoia airfield. Identifiable are PRP Roy Smart and PRP Ken Murrell, DFM dressed in the new Air Wing uniforms with brevets, standing at ease in front of Beech Bonanza VP-YRD. Next in line is a Piper Tri-Pacer after which is the Auster J/5F Aiglet VP-YJF and then a Cessna 180. (*The Outpost Magazine)*

Beech 35 Bonanza VP-YGZ was purchased September 1947 by Roy Smart. It was the first Air Wing aircraft to be fitted with radios to experiment with communications with ground forces. As Z-YGZ it took part in and completed the World Vintage Air Rally from London to Sydney in 1990. This image from the Smart family's Christmas Card. (Photo, Keith Holshausen)

had Dick Price and Pip Rogers with him as observers – both of whom know the Sipolilo area well – the Bonanza found the Auster first shot; thereafter it was a question of whether Wiggins would have enough fuel left. He had – but it was close.[13]

This was just one of the highlights of the three-day Air Wing exercise held for the Police Reserve at Sinoia over the period 11th to 13th May. There were many others. The Air Vice Marshal of the Royal Rhodesian Air Force arriving at Sinoia in a helicopter provided a thrill for all those present. In Sinoia they are now sold on the Alouette. The Commissioner of Police arriving with the Governor, Sir Humhprey Gibbs, who presented successful pilots and observers with their brevets. The comradeship evident between all those taking part in the exercise, and the many lessons learnt. All these were highlights.

The camp was set up at the Sinoia airstrip on the Wednesday and Thursday preceding the exercise, when the boffins installed their gear – diesel engines, radio transmitters and all the paraphernalia of a large camp. On the Thursday, the P.W.O.s from all Provinces arrived and were briefed in their duties by the Flight Commanders. Thereafter they were transported to the various stations throughout Lomagundi, where they acted as observers to every flight.

Friday morning saw the arrival of 14 aircraft of divergent makes- and sizes, together with their crews. A detailed briefing, lunch, and at 12 noon the first aircraft was airborne. Promptly too. Punctuality was meticulously observed and did much to ensure the success of the exercise. Saturday morning proved most unpopular, as the first aircraft had to be airborne by 6 a.m., which meant getting up in the dark. The remarks from the cold shower at 5 a.m. were illuminating but unprintable. Crews alternately flew and attended lectures throughout the day, which was the busiest of the exercise. With no flying on Sunday morning, Saturday night proved to be party night, and the Sinoia Police Reserve Canteen which provided the bar facilities must have had a profitable evening. We all did.

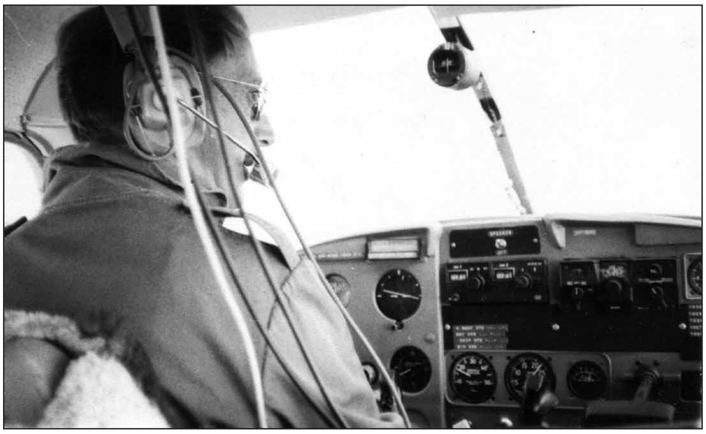
There was some conjecture as to how everyone was to be fetched out of bed early on Sunday morning. But this was easy. Church parade, and it was surprisingly well attended and enjoyed. After breakfast the P.W.O.s, who had arrived back at Sinoia the previous evening, gave a detailed resume of each flight undertaken in their area and assessed the capabilities of pilot and crew. This went down very well with the crews, who learned much. The standard achieved proved to be high.

Then it was spit and polish for the parade, and the new uniforms were worn for the first time. Believe it or not, the air crews looked exceptionally smart, and the parade went off without a hitch. The brevets (which were also an innovation) were awarded by the Governor, who had kindly consented to come to Sinoia for the occasion. To make it an all Air-Wing occasion he was flown out in one of the Wing's aircraft. After the parade came lunch and then the good-byes. But the farewells were not said before a word of praise was offered by the crews to those who had worked so hard on the ground to make the occasion the undoubted success it was. High praise was showered on Gideon Ellis and his staff, who so admirably supplied the meals throughout the three days. The Women Police Reserve who operated the radio sets came in for their share of congratulations, as did the Regular staff involved. It was unanimous that the exercise had been well worthwhile and should be repeated, if possible, annually.[14]

The 1963 training weekend was held on Roy Smart's farm from 23 to 26 May, where 19 aircraft took part with 41 crew. Exercises had been prepared by the BSAP to cover the Air Wings' role in internal security and to train regulars to work with air support. In the September issue of *The Outpost,* they explained how:

> some weeks before the exercise Members in Charge of twelve stations, ranging from the Eastern Districts to Marandellas,

Hugh Chisnall Copper 110 was Commander of the Marandellas Flight from inception **c.**1973–1976 and then Mrewa Flight Commander. He is standing in front of Auster AOP5 VP-YJX. (Photo by Keith Chisnall)



Jimmy Aitken.
A member of PRAW from the mid-60s Jimmy Aitken of the Manicaland Flight seen here on patrol at the controls of probably Cessna 180A VP-YJA. The instrument panel shows that this photograph was taken in flight as the engine setting (manifold pressure) shows 1,700rpm and the prop setting is 2,200rpm. He would appear to be in a gentle descending right hand turn. All cables hanging down from above were required to connect-up a separate police radio set for ground communications. As the aviation radio frequencies and police / military radio frequencies were not compatible, the police radio branch devised this system so that the radio and cabling could be removed when not on PRAW duties. (Kirsty Chatham, Jimmy's Daughter, Research. Photo by Bill Linfield)

> had prepared ground exercises involving incidents likely to be encountered in times of trouble and for which aircraft of the Air Wing could be utilised. These incidents also served to train section leaders and radio operators of the local Police Reserve units in working with aircraft and enabled ground forces to appreciate the abilities of the aircrew and their machines. Local schemes were carefully checked by Headquarters' staff and included the pinpointing of over 200 grid references, the working out of more than 900 courses, times allocated over target areas, diversions, alternative targets, cruising speeds and a search and rescue operation over Chipinga and Wedza.
>
> Regular members of the Police Reserve staff were brought in to act as ground observers and to report on the all-round ability of crews in dealing with incidents. Crews were further checked in all aspects of flying, radio procedure, written examinations and airmanship, and the final reports and marking sheets were carefully assessed and marked by debriefing staff. Inaugurated this year was the award of the Commissioner's Cup to the best aircrew, and the honour was deservedly won by Police Reserve Pilot Miller and Police Reserve Observer Magee of the Matabeleland Flight, the latter having previously been awarded a commendation for his part in the location and arrest of a gang of Africans in the Lupani area in 1962.
>
> The airmanship displayed by members of the Air Wing was of a very high order and received favourable comment from both the R.R.A.F. and the Department of Civil Aviation observers who were present. Favourable comment was also received from the R.R.A.F. in relation to the scope and careful planning of the exercise; on every sortie, at least ten separate operations were taking place at any one time, and in every instance, it was possible to give the position of each aircraft at any particular moment. The high standard of efficiency attained augurs well for future times of stress. This high standard is provided by what amounts to two squadrons of aircraft.
>
> In attendance during the course of the four-day exercise were the Prime Minister, the Commissioner of Police, Mr. F. E. Barfoot; the Deputy Commissioner, Mr. K. Flower, MBE, and other senior officers of the B.S.A. Police. A novel feature at the end of the exercise was a message-dropping competition. A set altitude was given and this, coupled with a crosswind, eased the cap band from many a crew; however, during the actual "incidents" in the exercise area some astonishingly accurate drops were recorded. Two worthy of note, were the depositing of a message bag in the back of a moving truck and the receipt of a further message bag through the open door of the local operations room.[15]

Radio communications fitted to civilian aircraft were not compatible with the police network, which lent importance to the skill of air-dropping messages. The messages were dispatched in a bag with a long trailing streamer to help those on the ground follow the bag down. Competition was high and in the exercise from a set height with a crosswind, two crews successfully dropped messages into the back of a moving truck. To achieve this accuracy crews had to fly low and slow, and not towards rising ground. During operations, two fatal accidents occurred during message drops.

On 21 May 1964, the training weekend started with the timed arrival of 20 participants at five-minute intervals, preceded by two RRAF Provost aircraft.

As recorded in the July edition of *The Outpost*:

> each pilot had been given a definite time of arrival at Fort Victoria. To prevent any last-minute delaying tactics aircraft had to circle Gokomere Mission twice and then make a direct approach to Fort Victoria airfield. The best time recorded, incidentally, was only one second outside the time laid down. After settling into their accommodation under canvas, crews assembled for a general briefing. They were welcomed by Mr Sherren, Officer Commanding, Victoria Province. The Mayor of Fort Victoria.

> Councillor O. C. George was also present and gave a short address. Owing to a last-minute shortage of Police Reserve Observers, Superintendent May and Sergeants Linfield and Purkis of the regular Police stood in as crews. The general briefing over, 'A' Flight were almost immediately called for individual briefing, and shortly afterwards the roar of engines heralded the start of the exercises over twelve stations in the Gwelo and Victoria Districts.
>
> The exercises had been prepared by Members in Charge of Stations and were designed to represent incidents likely to occur in times of emergency and requiring the use of ground patrols, radio, and ground to air signals. At each station involved a member of the Provincial Warrant Officer's staff was posted as an observer and the competing aircrews were marked on all aspects of their activities during the exercise, the results counting towards points for the Commissioner's Trophy. Aircrew were also marked on landing, taxi-ing and take-off procedure, points being deducted for failure to comply with standard civil aviation practice, incorrect radio procedure and other errors and faults. Back at Fort Victoria, "A" Flight touched down on completion of their exercises in time for a late lunch, and their place in the air was taken by "B" Flight for a repeat of the exercises at the same stations.
>
> That evening, for the first time at a Police Reserve Air Wing Exercise, a night flying exercise was held – in the shape of a cross-country flight of some two hours duration to Zaka and Gutu (confined to pilots holding night flying ratings). A number of crews located the two stations successfully but, it must be admitted, some failed – in most cases as a result of mistaking lighted buildings in the vicinity of the police stations for the stations themselves. Perhaps blue lamps on the roofs would have helped!
>
> At the same time experiments were carried out in illuminating homestead identification signs and ground code panel signs with truck lights and torches, and in most cases, crews reported they were able to read these quite distinctly. While the night flying was taking place, members not engaged were being entertained by His Worship the Mayor at a most enjoyable sundowner party – which was to be repeated the following night for those who took part in the night flying.

Another day of similar exercises was carried out:

> except that this time two or more stations were involved, and aircraft were required to land at least once for de-briefing and further briefing on what was required. It was on that day that the exercise was visited by the Minister of Law and Order, the Hon. Mr. C. Dupont, who flew into Fort Victoria in an Air Wing aircraft accompanied by the Acting Commissioner of Police, Mr. G. M. Harries. The Acting Chief of Air Staff, Air Commodore H. Hawkins, C.B.E., A.F.C., A.D.C., and the Chief of General Staff, Major-General J. Anderson, C.B.E., were also present, as were representatives of the Department of Civil Aviation and government departments in Fort Victoria.

On the Saturday the exercise:

> consisted of a search and rescue operation over the Selukwe and Chibi areas. The first aircraft were away at 0630 and 0632 hours, followed by the others at 25-minute intervals – the object of the long intervals being to permit each aircraft to complete its task and leave the operational area before the next arrived. For this exercise, each crew were given four map references covering an area three miles square.
>
> Somewhere in the nine square miles so delineated was in one case a lost police truck patrol, and in the other two lost Police Reservists. The object of the exercise was for the aircraft to locate the lost parties, pinpoint their position and pass on the information by dropping a message to a nearby patrol. In most cases crews were successful in carrying out this exercise. On this day a novel cross-country navigation exercise was introduced. Each crew was given an aerial photograph (provided by the R.R.A.F.) of a particular point either in the Umvuma or Belingwe areas, and a track on which to fly. They were then required to fly to the position depicted and identify it. Having done so they were to circle the spot twice, whereupon a ground party would lay out a panel on which had been painted the map reference of the next turning point, to which the aircraft then had to fly. Reaching the second point, crews were required to assess the suitability of a selected piece of land as an emergency landing ground and to make a note of the number of a truck parked on it.
>
> Once they had done this a further panel was laid down for them, giving a second map reference. On reaching the third point aircraft were required to land, hand in their description of the emergency landing ground, and then, having been given a further map reference as a check point, were required to prepare and hand over a full flight plan for their return flight to Fort Victoria. It is pleasing to note that most aircrews were able to complete this exercise – some possibly by playing follow-my-leader, to judge by reports subsequently received.
>
> Sunday morning's programme allowed for a lie-in and consisted of an inter-Flight message dropping competition between the two Flights, each under the command of its Flight Commander, who was also airborne. There was a sort of "Le Mans" start, with the crews lined up behind their aircraft. On the firing of a green Verey light they ran forward, climbed aboard and started up. After taxi-ing to the end of the runway, aircraft took off in pairs, and the sight of twelve aircraft, almost on each other's tails, was most impressive.
>
> The Acting Commissioner presented the trophy and miniatures to the winning crew, and tankards to the runners-up, Micky Anthony and Ray Smith of Bindura. Third and fourth places went to the two R.R.A.F. teams, Flight Lieutenant Reynolds and Pilot Officer Hume, and Squadron Leader Mussell and Flying Officer Harvey. This is the first occasion on which the R.R.A.F. have taken an active part in the Air Wing Exercise. Members who were able to delay their departure to mid-afternoon were treated to an excellent display of formation aerobatics by a team of Provosts from the R.R.A.F. station at Thornhill.[16]

Gatooma hosted the 1965 training session from 9 to 11 June, with 20 of the 24 aircraft on PRAW strength in attendance. Two RRAF Provost crews also attended, determined to win the Commissioner's Trophy. Over the two and a half day exercise 246 take-offs and landings were recorded.

The police magazine reported that:

> each aircraft has been allocated a sector as its normal area of operations and is equipped with a multi-channel V.H.F. radio for communication with local police stations and police parties on the ground. In this way, complete air/ground police coverage of Rhodesia has been built up. We believe this is unique in Africa and may have few parallels anywhere in the world.[17]

Casevac Tony Eldridge (Training). Sub-lieutenant Tony Eldridge DSC was a Royal Navy officer who volunteered for special service and was sent for dive training. In April 1944, he was taught how to operate with the chariot, a manned torpedo. On 27 October 1944, he and his companion Petty Officer, Sidney "Butch" Woollcott, boarded their chariot nicknamed 'Tiny,' and aboard another chariot, nicknamed 'Stasher,' were another two officers. They were to enter Phuket Harbour in Thailand and attack specified Japanese naval targets. They launched from HMS *Trenchard* for the six miles to the targets, which they successfully destroyed and returned to the submarine. As the leader of the mission, Tony received the Distinguished Service Cross. He moved to Rhodesia in 1960, where he joined the British South African Police Reserve PATU in which he served for 18 years.

Once again, *The Outpost*, in its July 1965 edition reported on the exercises:

> The previous day had commenced with each pilot being telephoned at home and being instructed to fly to one of eleven police stations in Rhodesia with his observer, and to report at their destination by a given time. Upon arrival of two aircraft at each station, as far apart as Fort Victoria and Karoi, they joined with the local Regular and Reserve forces in combined Air/Ground exercises designed by the local Member in Charge. Objects behind this were (a) flying in unfamiliar territory, (b) the appreciation of the other's problems (as only one aircraft flew at a time and the non-flying team of pilot and observer joined with the ground forces), and (c) to practise the techniques necessary for success in the marked exercises which were to follow in Gatooma. Each crew night stopped at these stations … Very early the following morning each crew was given sealed orders involving a navigation exercise from their overnight stop to Gatooma, which officially was the first intimation they had been given as to the whereabouts of the exercise base.
>
> En route they had to locate a police vehicle in the vicinity of the Ngesi Bridge and drop a message to its occupants, then proceed to a bridge over the Umfuli River, which they had to identify from a R.R.A.F. aerial photograph and a very general set of clues only; upon arrival again to drop a message giving details of the bridge's whereabouts, and then on a given course to proceed to Bosbury Airfield near Hartley before proceeding to Gatooma.[18]

Typical search and rescue exercises, casevac, and reconnaissance flights were completed by the crews. A formation of four planes escorted the aircraft transporting visiting dignitaries in a formation that was recorded as 'an impressive and colourful sight.[19]

In this PRAW exercise at Buffalo Range, Tony volunteered to be an injured soldier and was loaded onto a rather large stretcher. Even though the middle and rear seats of this Cherokee 6 had been removed Tony could not be loaded into the aircraft:

> The final competition took place, which consisted of each aircraft being sent up to 1,000 feet, thence to land with closed throttle upon, or as near to as possible, a marked cross on the airfield. Simulated barriers were placed at distances each side of the cross and marks were deducted for "crashing" these barriers and also graded marks were awarded according to the distance each aircraft actually stopped from the cross. This exercise involved great skill and nerve on the part of pilots and thrilled the spectators who had assembled at the airfield. The winners of the Commissioner's Trophy, presented on his behalf by the Minister of Law and Order, Mr. D. Lardner-Burke, were F/Lieutenant Varkevisser and F/Officer Geldenhuys of No. 4 Squadron, Royal Rhodesian Air Force, who must be congratulated on a very fine performance throughout. Runners-up were P/Reserve Pilot Brittlebank and P/Reserve Observer Barnett of Bulawayo, and third were P/Reserve Pilot Ashworth of Salisbury and P/Reserve Pilot J. Manning of Sinoia, who was his observer.[20]

Some PRAW crews received training at the Thornhill Air Base. On joining the unit Allan Abrey flew with Ken Murrell to the base for a week's induction course of lectures and some flying. He recalled:

> some of the things we were taught which bore no resemblance to the real thing when the war heated up. Such as if you spotted enemy forces, dive down on to them to indicate their position to following friendly security units. In those days our instructors must have thought the 'Terrs' were armed with 303's or shotguns because when the chips were down, we were forbidden to fly below 1500 feet AGL. However, the exercises were fun because – show me the pilot who did not enjoy doing a wingover then diving down to about 100 feet and into a sharp pull up.[21]

The month-long Exercise Mannix, in October 1968 was focused on police ATOPS (anti-terrorist operations) with the support of

PRP Rod Bater with VP-YIS Cessna Reims Rocket simulating a downed aircraft in the bush for PRAW to find and using TR 62 radio for communications. (Photo by Rod Bater)

three air force Alouette helicopters. A real life casevac was required when a game ranger was severely gored by a cow elephant at Buffalo Bend on the Nuanetsi River, in Gona re Zhou Game Reserve.

Future weekend training sessions had a growing emphasis on working with ground forces and the RhAF. Each provincial wing held quarterly training sessions and then they all gathered for the annual three to four day group training and competitions. Some specialised four-day gunnery courses were held at the Katanga range during 1978 and 1979.

The Midlands flight used Gwelo civilian airport for nighttime training, as it was quieter than their Thornhill base and they were able to use goose-neck flares to familiarise pilots with landing using paraffin fired lights.

Post 1980 training was an important part of the Air Wing's annual calendar, supplemented with quarterly training for each of the Provincial flights

Airfields and Weather

There was an abundance of airfields scattered throughout Rhodesia, ideal for the type of aircraft flown by PRAW. The majority were privately owned, many were grass and gravel with varying levels of sophistication. They were generally, 1,000 metres long, with or without runway markers or windsocks and some with challenging approaches. On every landing there was the possibility of encountering grazing stray animals or local inhabitants who would use these airstrips as short cuts.

A more deadly danger was mines. On some airfields, guarding troops would drive a mine-proof vehicle up and down the runway ahead of an inbound aircraft. Bill Linfield stated: 'there were occasions when landing on a main road was safer and more practical than landing at the nearest airstrip, some of these more used stretches of road were actually painted with markers to assist pilots to identify the length of the landing area available.[22]

The Mutawatawa airfield in the Maramba TTL, Mrewa District, like many had a narrow dirt runway. On 19 February 1979, Byrne Gardiner of INTAF (Internal Affairs) successfully negotiated the difficult approach and had touched down safely. He taxied to the parking area and as he stopped, the Cessna 206 detonated a land mine. Along with Byrne, District Security Assistants Leonard Mchonjomera, Cain Ndhlovo and Joram Nyamayaro, all died of their injuries. As was the practice on all these strips, the runway had been scanned for land mines first thing that morning.

As needed, permanent forward airfields (FAFs) were established in the operational areas. Some were commercial airports with all the standard facilities, while others were unpaved, offering tented accommodation until more substantial buildings were erected.

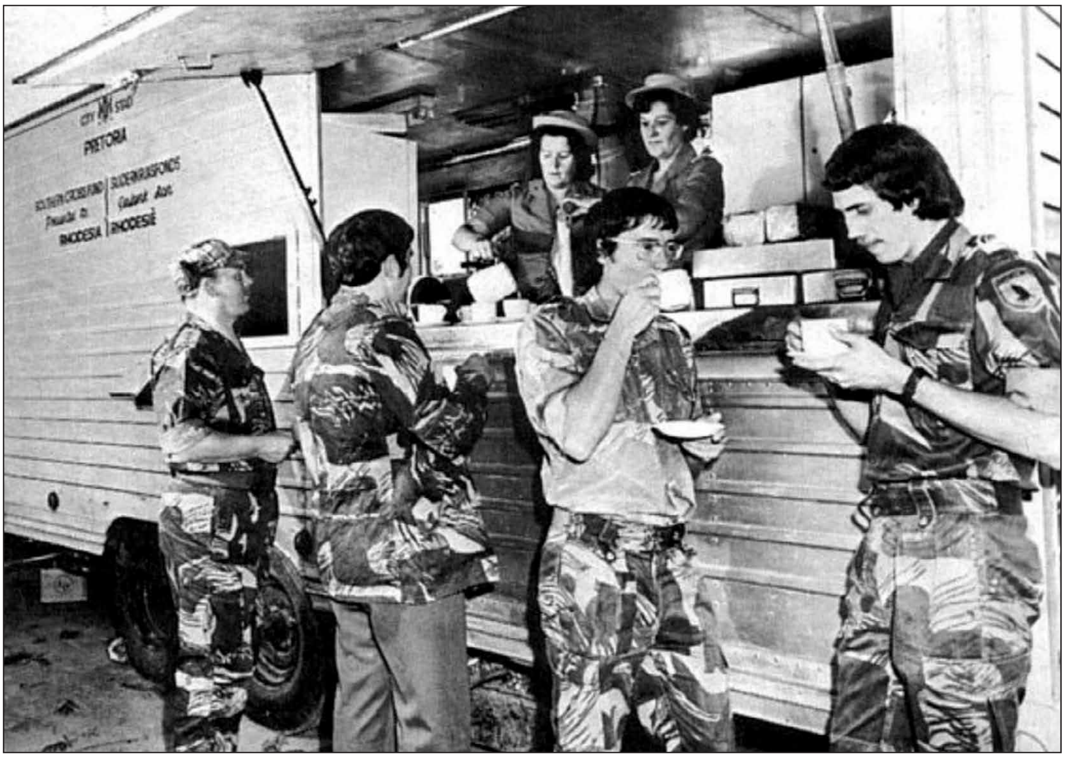
This wooden barrack building is typical of those used at Forward Command Centres. Note the sandbagged bunker and the swimming pool. (Photo by Bill Linfield)

Catering was provided by the Air Force and supplemented by the 'Hamburger Ladies.' These were mainly Woman's Institute (WI) volunteers who manned the 'hamburger huts,' dispensing cold drinks, burgers, and other comfort foods not available in the mess facilities.

One of these important women, Hilda Lawrence Oliver, a member of the BSAP Women's Field Reserve, wrote about her time in a Hamburger Hut:

> An opportunity came up for myself and an A Reservist friend to volunteer in the Hamburger Hut, run by the W.V.S., in Mount Darwin. We

The military side of Kariba airport with an Alouette III on the left and visible the tail section of an RhAF C-47 in the pre-war camouflage scheme. (Rhodesianforces.org)



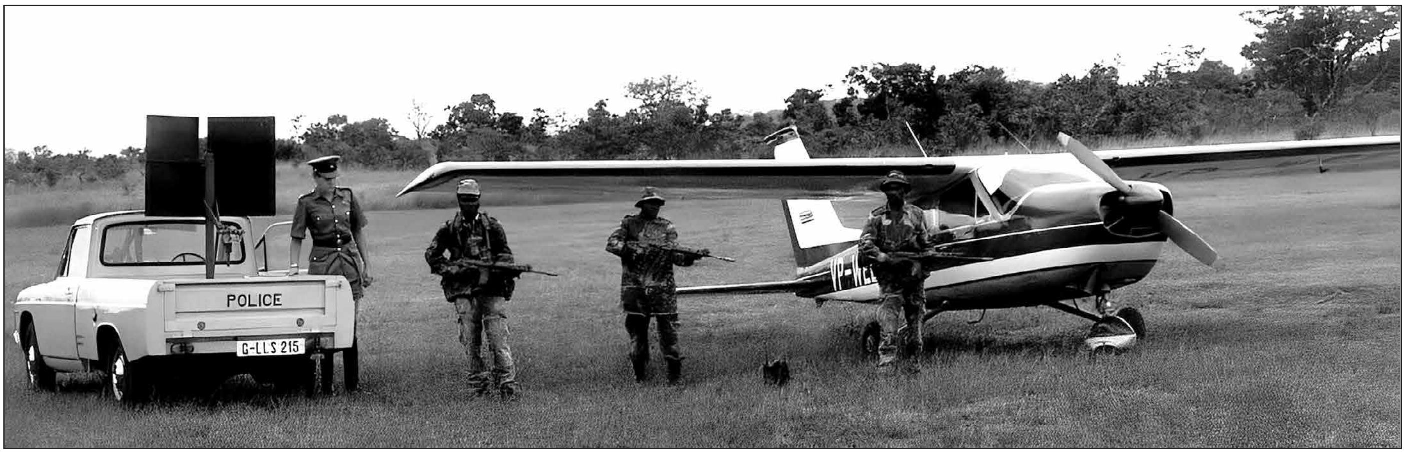
The 'Hamburger Ladies' from the WI, Police Reserve Field Reserve, or simply farmers' wives, were important to the troops coming in from the bush. Hilda Lawrence Olivier did three stints at the Hamburger Hut in Mt Darwin in the mid-seventies, 'I was Police Reserve, not WI, but volunteered and had a great time. I was in Admin in PR so felt I was doing a bit more that way. Our "office" was the club kitchen and we served through the window looking out over the pool.'[24]
Joan Cooper used to do her "call-ups" in this role, also at Mt Darwin. She loved every minute of doing her bit and was a very proud WI member together with her circle of friends. John G. Bennett used to make a point of stopping in at the canteen in Rusape, where he recalls the farmers' wives were doing their bit. He wrote that they were wonderful, and the food was always excellent. Chris Botton felt he had the best burgers ever from WI when on patrol in Bikita with PATU in 1976. This South African donated mobile canteen provided home comforts in Umtali in 1976. (BSAP Regimental Association)

stayed in the Guest Lodge attached to the District Commissioner's house, Jim and Jill Latham were extremely hospitable, and it was safe and very convenient for the Hut, which utilised the kitchen at Sports Club, opposite the D.C.'s offices and the Army camp. In all I did two single weeks and then one two-week stint in a period of about six months.

The Hut was open from 12 noon to 2 p.m. and we served the food through the kitchen window, which looked out over the swimming pool. The lads would line up outside, place their orders, pay, and then wait for us to get the order together. We had a chef and a potwasher, two gas stoves and a pie warmer in a room about 10 feet by 8 feet. Mount Darwin was a hot place and combined with the heat of the kitchen equipment and no through draught and we were in a bath of perspiration. Eventually I used to wear my swimming costume with a skirt over it and a towel around my neck! Roll on two o'clock and a dip in the pool. The barman, "Dr" Chitate, would provide ice-cold Coca Cola when we asked and keep a book until the end of the shift when we paid our dues.

It was great to have a quick chat with the boys passing through and hopefully lift their spirits before they returned to the bush. On one occasion a deployment of South African Police were on their way to Mukumbura or somewhere similar and kept us very busy with all the orders, but one young constable came around to the back and into the kitchen so that we to talk more easily while we made up the orders. While we chatting there was a great noise filling the air and two Hunters beat up the JOC and Mt Darwin at near zero feet, passing from behind us and over the building and the pool. My friend and I jumped to the window to watch them, and I remember saying, "Oh that's okay, they're ours." The planes peeled off to the right and headed back to Gwelo. I turned around to speak to the SAP Constable and couldn't see him! He had taken cover.

Supplying an unknown demand was often an issue. On one day we were very busy and had made a lot more buns than usual, supplies were running short when a convoy arrived and ordered 200 assorted buns. We nearly had to rush around and see if we could get more buns from the bakery, hamburgers, and bacon out



PO Ian Mackintosh deploys three reservists to airfield protection for Cessna 177 Cardinal VP-WEE at Karoi in 1978. (Photo, Keith Holshausen)

Aircraft taking off or landing were under threat of an attack in the form of ground fire from small arms, RPG (Rocket Propelled Grenade), or anti-aircraft missiles. In 1972, the RhAF Security Section managed to persuade the South African Government to donate 12 Elan 60 armoured cars for airfield security duties. Modelled on the French Panhard AML 245 the Eland 60 was armed with a 60mm breech-loading mortar and a single 7.62mm Browning machine gun. They were deployed at all FAFs and the two main air force bases. The crews would parole the airfield perimeter, looking out for suspicious activity and then position themselves in the best position to provide an immediate response to any attack. (Photo by Alan Murray)

> of the freezer and count the eggs we had left. We managed in the end to get the order out without delaying the troops too much.[23]

From the late 1970s PRAW crews would be based at a FAF for a week at a time, from Monday to Monday. Bill Linfield wrote, ‘that invariably personnel, or miscellaneous spares and provisions were flown in with the aircraft beginning a tour. Importantly the Hamburger Ladies changed over their duties the same day and where possible, they would fly in with PRAW.’

At a minimum, a helicopter and a fixed wing aircraft would be available, and at some of the larger airfields full Fire Force elements were resident. Over time, the FAF Commander role assigned to the senior pilot on base was replaced when Squadron Leader ranked officers were posted as permanent commanders on a two-year deployment.

While serving on forward airfields Graham Patterson noted:

> Another task we all enjoyed was the placing of runway lighting whenever a light aircraft was to fly in the darkness. Either bringing in a casevac (black or white, civilian, or military) so they could receive medical attention in Bindura or indeed fly out to a remote bush site to collect these injured people. Most times this was by the local PRAW. The airfield had no fixed electrical installation for runway lighting, so we had to do the next best thing and place paraffin filled drums with wicks sticking out of a goose neck, and thus called ‘goose neck flares.’ There was a predetermined layout to help pilots judge height and length. In some cases where these flares were not available, we used the lights of vehicles to illuminate the threshold and runway.[25]

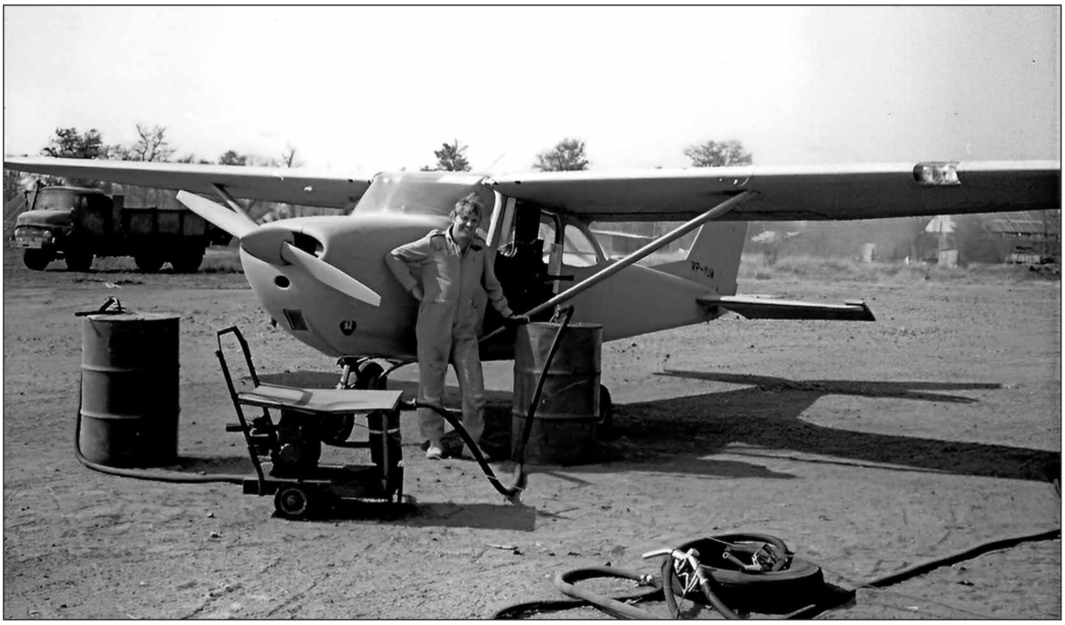
On arrival on station, PRAW came under the direction of the Air Force. Firstly, there was briefing by the senior operations officer, followed by a familiarisation tour of the airfield, noting all the facilities, assembly points and dugout positions in case of an attack on the camp. Aircraft were kept at immediate readiness and were refuelled immediately on return from a flight. Sometimes the refuelling equipment consisted of just a hand operated wobble pump, locally termed a ‘kamina–kawena’ after the sound it made when hand-pumping fuel.

Bill Linfield recalled how, when not in the Ops room:

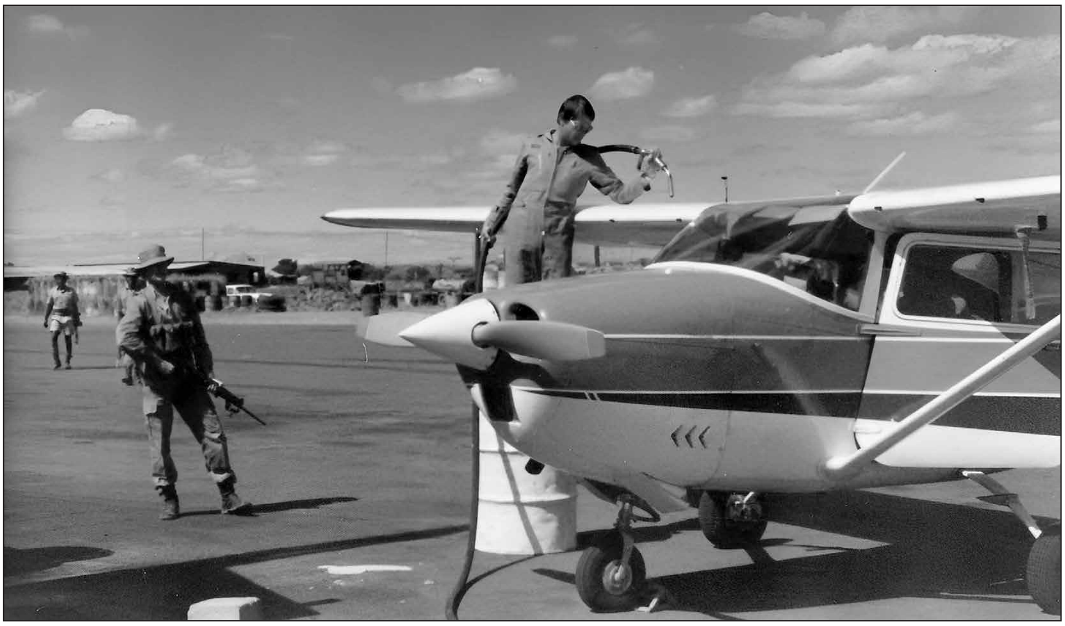
> the PRAW Pilot would be summoned by a speaker system, used for broadcasting urgent messages to personnel on the FAF. “PRAW pilot report to the Ops room” would mean drop everything and get there. The briefing officer would give you the task to be flown with as much information of call signs, locations, personnel to be uplifted or dropped off, top cover, supplies to be dropped, and where necessary, the most accurate map reference to fly to. With no GPS, precise flight-planning had to be prepared to ensure a successful sortie.[26]

Crews found that they flew to a large number, if not all, of the airfields in the country. Wally Barton wrote that in that way they, ‘gained a good knowledge of the country and of bad weather flying.’

Central Africa is renowned for its spectacular thunderstorms, extreme turbulence, wind shear and heavy rain or hail, which reduced visibility. The conditions change quickly and regularly and pilots



Refuelling after a flight Peter Marchussen uses a lawnmower-motor driven pump, mounted on a portable frame to pump fuel from 200 litre drums. (Photo, P Marchussen)

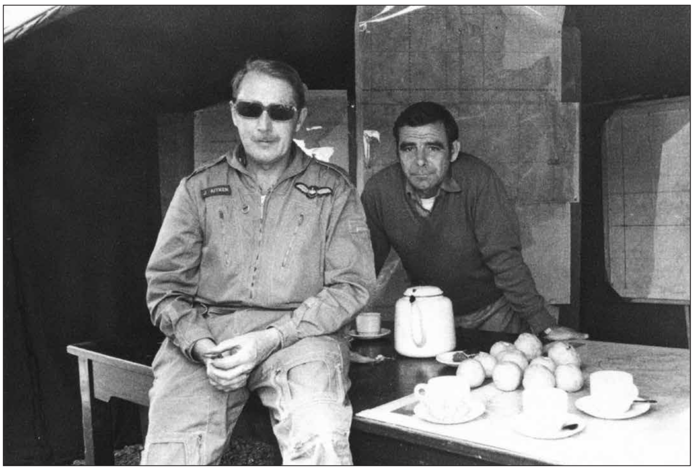


Although standing on a 200 litre drum to access the fuel tanks, John Steed, under the watchful eye of an airfield guard, appears to refuel Cessna 182 VP–WFY at FAF5 Mtoko from underground tanks. (Photo, John Steed)

had to find their way through inclement weather. A more insidious threat was the deadly 'guti'. Described by Bill Linfield as, 'a low level cloud formation which occurs in waves with marginally improved visibility between each wave. It was unwise for a pilot who was not instrument rated to fly in these visually restricting weather conditions, as this could lead to a pilot becoming disoriented and lose control of the aircraft or strike the side of an unseen hill.' He went on to explain that, 'a further haze occurs between late July and early November when the smoke of seasonal bush fires is trapped below the layer of temperature inversion. The smoke cannot dissipate which results in reduced visibility and in more severe cases the disappearance of the horizon altogether. Navigation in these conditions is most challenging, GPS did not exist, and the vital landmarks were hidden in the haze.[27]

It was noted by Bob Needham that the majority of:

> PRAW pilots, me included, did not hold instrument ratings. Furthermore, most PRAW aeroplanes were not legally equipped for flight into full Instrument Meteorological Conditions. That being the case many PRAW pilots certainly had one or more very hairy bad



The Ops room at Chipinga with PRP Jimmy Aitken and Guy Menage, a voluntary helper from middle Sabi. (Photo by Jimmy Aitken)

Alan Murray, Copper 161, in standard PRAW clothing, waits with his aircraft, a Cessna 177 Cardinal VP-WEE, at a well-developed Forward Air Base. Typical residents are the background an Aérospatiale Alouette III and Reims Cessna FTB 337G Lynx. (Photo by Alan Murray)

Dorowa Airfield, near the Dorowa phosphate mine in Manicaland; from where Kevin Peinke and Norman Maasdorp took off in heavy 'guti' conditions to search for a missing aircraft on 23 February 1978. Flying two Alouette III helicopters, they hopped from village to village at very low level searching for information. Fading light forced them to overnight and continue the following day. Again, in poor conditions, and flying at low level through gorges and valleys one of the Selous Scouts on board spotted, where the tree line stopped and a cliff face began, the wreckage of the aircraft that Angelos Stam had been flying on PRAW duties. (Photo by Alan Murray)

CESSNA
VP-WEE

The acting editor of *The Outpost Magazine*, Blair Drummond, Assistant Commissioner Pugh and PRP Alan Murray wait for a break in the weather on Montesuma Farm strip belonging to PRP Bert Hacking. It was almost two hours before they could take off for their destination at Makuti airfield 30 miles northeast of Kariba. Here A/C Pugh conducted the annual inspection of this remote police station manned by 14 BSAP regulars. (Photo by Keith Holshausen)

> weather experiences over time. Personally, I had quite a few of these frightening bad weather flights whereby good luck and not skill saved the day. The go, no-go decision to fly was often tempered by the possibility that a no-go decision could lead to security force members dying. I must say my two major fears were being captured by terrorists closely followed by stupidly trying to complete a task in bad weather when the cloud was on the deck.[28]

Bob provided an example where these fears played a role in one of his flights:

> In late May of 1976 I did a one-week PRAW deployment to FAF9 at Rutenga. At the time 'Prop' Preller Geldenhuys was the Senior Air Rep. at the mini-JOC. Sometime during the deployment, Prop asked me to fly him home to FAF7 for a spot of R and R. My logbook shows a PRAW flight of 1 hour 20 mins on 31 May 1976 out of Rutenga. Just the one on that day. I think that this was the flight in question. There was a 'guti' blowing hard from the East-south-East at the time and I expressed my doubts about attempting the flight, but Prop said something along the lines of "Well let's go and have a look anyway." On getting airborne in our Cessna 172 VP-WDB with my observer, Roger Fenner on board and Prop in the back seat, the cloud base was about 200 feet above ground level. As the flight progressed the base got lower and lower, and the visibility deteriorated seriously due to heavy rain and drizzle. I decided to turn back. Just as I put the

Mr P. P. Palmer accepting the Pat Judson Trophy at the 1967 Air Wing's annual dinner-dance. From left, Chief Superintendent and Mrs C. N. Podmore, Mr and Mrs Palmer and Mr A. K. (Ken) Murrell.(*The Outpost Magazine*)

> aeroplane into the low safe cruise configuration and started a turn back for home, I clipped the cloud base at a height of about 50 feet and lost sight of the ground for a few brief moments. Rolling out on my reciprocal heading I quickly regained sight of the ground and started to orbit at 50 feet in a slightly clearer area. At one stage, I contemplated a precautionary landing in the bush but my number one fear of being captured by terrorists kicked in and quickly put the kibosh on that thought. So, gritting my teeth and drawing on my low flying skills gained as a crop spraying pilot in the Kenya Great Rift Valley I decided to fly very close to the ground and head south for the railway line leading to Rutenga. I also flew at about 65 knots with 20 degrees of flap extended. After what seemed like ages, I picked up the railway line and with a sigh of relief followed it to the Rutenga rail head. A quick jink around the tall lighting towers in the rail yards, the tops of which were in cloud, and I was on a right base for the landing strip. A moment later, we were down in one piece, and I clearly remember the FAF radio operator saying, "Welcome back Copper 33."[29]

In a similar incident, a PRAW pilot's attempt to casevac a seriously injured Major André Dennison 'was thwarted by low cloud and had to return.'[30] The Major had to be transported to hospital by a Dakota with instrument rated crew. A ground-controlled approach (GCA) by Blake Few was used to get Rod Bater back to base at Thornhill with a casevac on board at night and in impossible weather. Angelos Stam lost his life as he was persuaded, against his better judgement, to fly in very marginal weather. He was seen at almost zero feet over the Kyle Dam wall, but when he lost sight of the river he was following, he flew into the raised ground as the river flowed round a left-hand bend.

A significant acknowledgement of the crews' skills and commitment came when the Wing was awarded the Pat Judson Trophy in 1967 and again in 1978. Named in memory of Pat Judson, the first Rhodesian to lose his life in the 10 years that commercial aviation had been established in Rhodesia. Flying a Cirrus Moth, Daniel Sievewright Judson, crashed at Belvedere Aerodrome, on 20 November 1931.

Judson had served as a soldier in South-West Africa and Europe during World War I, before transferring to the Royal Flying Corps as an observer, and a year later he had qualified as a pilot. He was seriously wounded in combat. On recovery, he continued his service with the RFC until he returned to Rhodesia and, not long after, he joined the Rhodesia Aviation Company.

His career with the fledging airline was going from strength to strength. He would commute to Salisbury from Bulawayo weekly to teach people to fly. On this occasion, he was taking Jock Speight, a previous pupil, on a refresher check flight when the DH Puss Moth, VP-YAB, appeared to stall on landing final approach and dived into the ground from about 100ft. The nation went into mourning and funds were raised for a memorial. In addition a silver trophy was manufactured in England and presented by Mr Gordon Cooper, which became known as the 'Pat Judson Memorial Floating Trophy.' This would be awarded annually 'for the most meritorious flight or series of flights made by an individual or an organisation in the cause of aviation, or the community in Rhodesia as a whole, when flying has been the prominent feature of the service.'

The Trophy was presented on 17 November 1967 by Dr S. G. Hooker, the Technical Director (Aero) of Bristol Siddeley Engines Ltd. who was in Rhodesia especially for the ceremony. An *Outpost* journalist wrote that:

> Mr M. Madders, President of the Rhodesian Branch of the Royal Aeronautical Society and Director of Civil Aviation, said: "I am particularly happy in the choice made this year since the Police Air Wing have played a vital part in the maintenance of law and order in this country. During the past year, the Air Wing has been used extensively in conjunction with the regular forces in reporting terrorist activities. Whilst security precludes mention of specific operations. I can assure you that members of the Air Wing have cheerfully undertaken long hours of duty in their own time with a high measure of success under difficult conditions and with continuing high morale.[31]

3
Aircraft and Arms

Increased intensity of operations saw crews frequently subjected to small arms ground fire. Farmers' initiative came to the fore when Bill Ludgater, holder of the Legion of Merit, placed a plough disc on the seat of his Cessna 180F VP-YWL. This somewhat uncomfortable addition resulted in a local company manufacturing various high tensile steel armoured seats that balanced weight against protection and saved lives. As late as July 1978, Matabeleland Flight crews were requesting flak jackets be issued for them to sit on.

Aircraft Protection

In late 1979, Chris Thorne was provided with a single bulletproof vest, which contained ceramic tiles mounted on a fibreglass chest plate. During a contact north of Bindura with gunner John Sole, a National Service Patrol Officer on the BSAP Field Reserve, Chris was hit in the chest by an AK-47 round, luckily one of the few times he wore the vest. PGHQ requested it was returned for examination and it was never seen again – or replaced.

Jim Barker wrote in his book *Zimbabwe Paradise Plundered* that while operating from Centenary in 1975, he had seen Hammy Dax return from a flight near the Mozambique border with his fuel tanks holed in several places. Not only was the ubiquitous AK-47 a danger, but both nationalist forces were supplied with Strela handheld anti-aircraft missiles and RPG launchers.

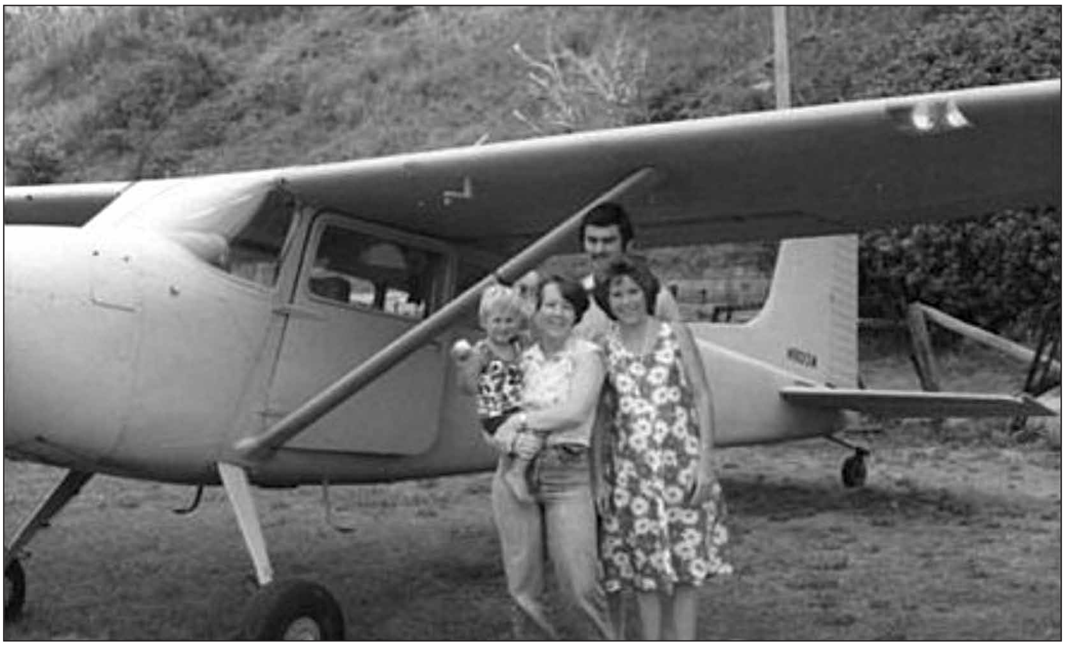
The high-gloss paintwork and polished metal of civilian aircraft reflects heat and enhanced the chance of a missile strike. Tragically two Air Rhodesia Viscount airliners were lost to Strela attacks, with the loss of all passengers and crews. Local paint manufacturers developed a matt paint with a low heat signature without an adverse weight penalty. There was a choice of three colours: grey, an unpopular yellow, and dark olive green. The paint was adopted by the national airline, some small charter service and a few of the PRAW pilots. Many of the commercial and military aircraft were fitted with exhaust shrouds to direct engine heat away from the airframe. Matabeleland Flying School's Cessna 172M, VP-WDB, was 'Strela proofed' with this type of paint and an exhaust shroud over the exhaust.

N9013M had been imported and owned by the Mission Aviation Fellowship and was based at Karanga Mission northeast of Mount Darwin. Chris Francis came across the Cessna at Charles Prince Airport where it was undergoing repair after it was force landed on a sand bar. Once the overhaul was complete, Chris took ownership. It was resprayed in anti-Strela paint but was damaged when the contractors let the paint stripper run over into the frames holding the Perspex. All of this was replaced, and the aircraft repainted post the settlement.

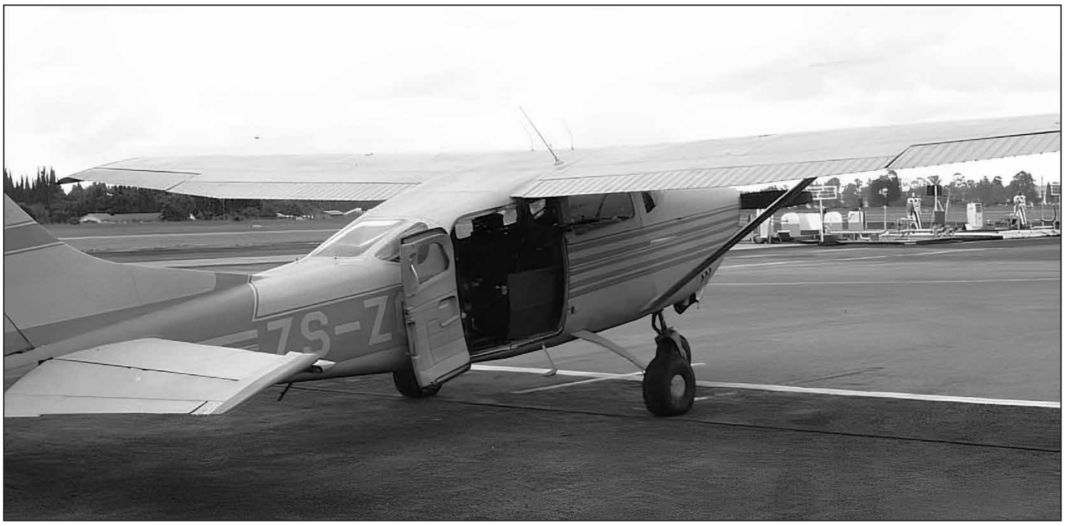
While the civilian registrations were retained as a means of identifying each individual aircraft, this was not always prominently displayed, and it is often therefore difficult in photographs to accurately identify one aircraft from another. From an operational perspective, each aircraft always adopted the appropriate call sign of the respective pilot.

The 9K32 Strela-2, known by NATO as the SA-7, is a lightweight, shoulder-fired, surface-to-air missile (SAM), using a fairly primitive infrared (IR) tracker within a narrow IR band. It is designed as an air defence weapon, which attempts to force aircrew to fly above 7,500ft where they would be more visible to radar detection and vulnerable to anti-aircraft fire and large SAM systems. On initial firing the missile cannot 'see' the heat radiation from the exhaust or jet pipe of an aeroplane engine and at first homes on the type of radiation emitted by the sun, clouds, trees, silver, or brightly coloured shiny aeroplanes. When close enough, it locks onto the heat radiation from the engine, exhaust or jet pipe, which is a different type of radiation. Knowledge of the workings of the missile allowed the Rhodesian Air Force and PRAW pilots to formulate and hone their anti-missile techniques. Bulawayo flight members were taught these techniques on training days at the Thornhill Air Force Base. Reserve pilots often flew at tree top height, about 50ft, which did not give a missile operator the necessary six seconds required to aim and fire, or above 1,2000ft, which was beyond the missile's range. Some believed that just below the cloud level was safe as the clouds absorbed heat given off by the aircraft. All air operations adopted standard combat procedures when landing and departing airports and airfields. These involved high-speed, steep spiral descents and steep, full power spiral take-offs.

The Rhodesian Air Force dictated that all gunnery



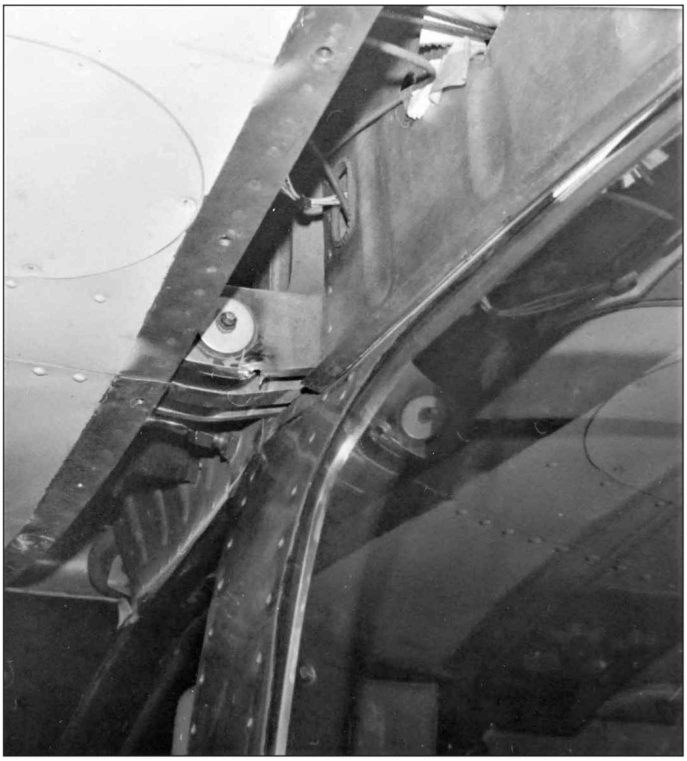
Cessna 180H N9013M in anti-Strela grey at Virginia Airport Durban South Africa in September 1979, with no underwing registration numbers to ensure it could not be identified from the ground. Chris Thorne's wife Ro is on the right with their son Marc in the arms left, and two friends, centre. (Photo by Chris Thorne)



Tony Mann recorded, upon its introduction to service, Cessna 206 ZS-ZGZ was initially finished in an overall matt-grey military colour scheme intended to reduce the infrared heat signature of the aircraft as a deterrent against the SAM-7 missile. However, with the imminent arrival of the Commonwealth Monitoring Force towards the end of 1979, instructions were given, for both political and security reasons, for the civilian 'appearance' and identity to be restored on certain aircraft. In the case of ZS-ZGZ this was simply accomplished with a roll of masking tape and some matt-orange paint applied to the fuselage and wing tips over the existing matt-grey finish. ZGZ therefore adopted a new and easily identifiable appearance. (Photo by Tony Mann)

operations, both helicopter and fixed wing, were to be conducted at 800ft AGL and while this height meant that crews were easily able to identify friend from foe as far as the ground forces were concerned, it also meant that crews and aircraft were often in danger from ground fire.

The Browning was known for jams when the spent round sleeve parted from the end cap and lodged in the breach, it was then necessary for the gunner to remove the block to extract the offending case. It was during such a clearance when pilot Chris Thorne broke off from an attack orbit and then returned to the contact, that an AK round hit the wind spoiler on the forward part of the open door. It then tumbled and fatally wounded his gunner, John Revill.



Main spar damage to VP-WEE from AK-47 ground fire near Mtoko. Not the first time WEE had been damaged. (Photo by Alan Murray)

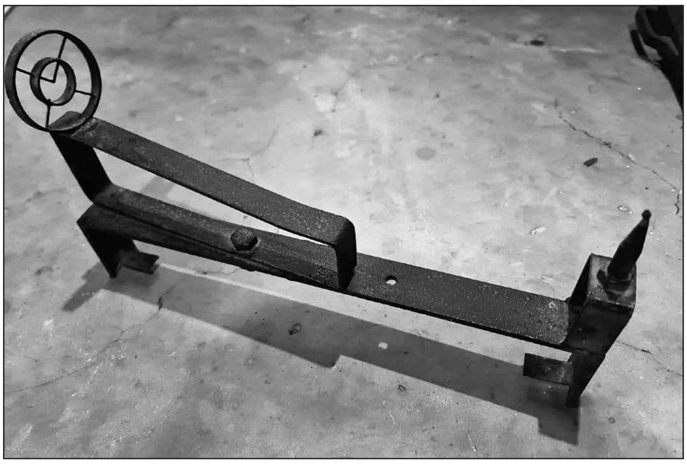
In September 1979, Bill Linfield and PRO John Schwickard had a lucky escape. They had noticed a group of men who when they spotted the aircraft moved off in separate directions. Once overhead it was clear one of the men was carrying an RPG. Bill entered a left-hand orbit and John fixed the gun sights on the target. Turbulence made it difficult to maintain a stable orbit and Bill decided to adjust his flight path. As he levelled off the RPG operator stepped out from cover and fired at the aircraft. Bill saw the rocket leave the launcher and began evasive action, but they were fortunate that RPG had been fired without 'laying off ' to compensate for the aircraft's orbital track, so it passed harmlessly behind the aircraft.

Although no SALOPS aircraft or crew were lost to ground fire, some damage was sustained. Tony Mann could not recall that any damage was sustained by ZS-ZGZ. He did 'remember one aircraft sustaining several bullets strikes to the engine, causing some cowling and power-plant damage.'

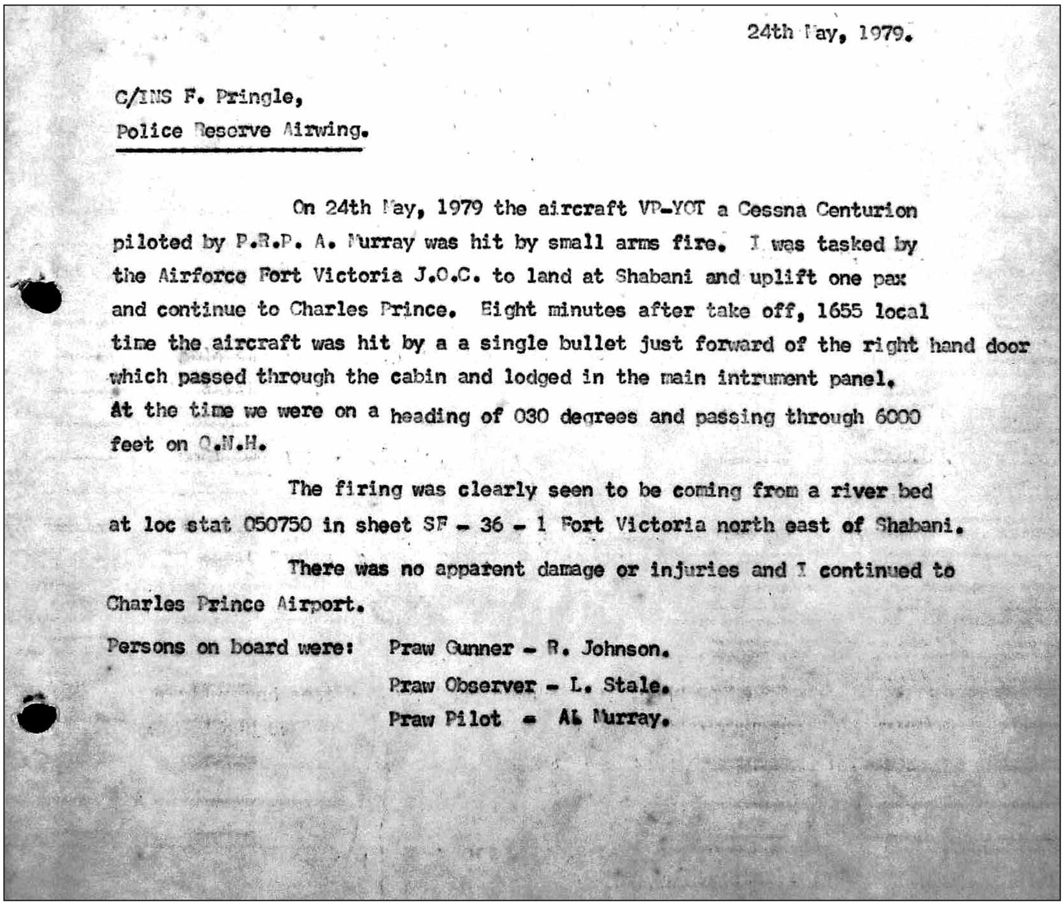
Aircraft Armament

It was never envisioned that the Air Wing would engage in combat but with the RhAF stretched to its limits, armed PRAW aircraft were used to fill gaps and at times acted as first strike aerial support for ground forces. 'The aircraft were typically armed with a single Browning .303 machine gun. Some crews opted for the .762 MAG. The former had a faster rate of fire and the other higher bullet velocity. I preferred the Browning,'[2] said Ian Pringle, Copper 284, 'pilot and gunner teamwork was essential, which meant seeing the target together. I drew marks on the pilot's window to position the plane to help keep the target within the gunner's scope.'

Les Jellicoe was flying as Wally Barton's observer in January 1978 when Les and his father designed and constructed a tripod, which fitted onto the seat rails behind the front seats.



A close-up of the gun sight fitted to a Browning machine gun mounted in Cessna N9013M. (Photo by Chris Thorne)



24th May, 1979.

C/INS F. Pringle,
Police Reserve Airwing.

On 24th May, 1979 the aircraft VP-YOT a Cessna Centurion piloted by P.R.P. A. Murray was hit by small arms fire. I was tasked by the Airforce Fort Victoria J.O.C. to land at Shabani and uplift one pax and continue to Charles Prince. Eight minutes after take off, 1655 local time the aircraft was hit by a a single bullet just forward of the right hand door which passed through the cabin and lodged in the main intrument panel. At the time we were on a heading of 030 degrees and passing through 6000 feet on Q.N.H.

The firing was clearly seen to be coming from a river bed at loc stat 050750 in sheet SF - 36 - 1 Fort Victoria north east of Shabani.

There was no apparent damage or injuries and I continued to Charles Prince Airport.

Persons on board were: Praw Gunner - R. Johnson.
Praw Observer - L. Stale.
Praw Pilot - Al Murray.

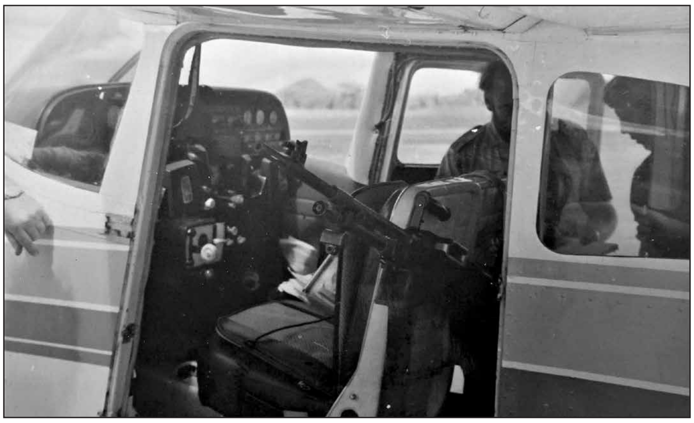
Report of ground fire on VP-YOY on 24 May 1979
An incident report from 24 May 1979 when VP-YOT a Cessna Centurion, piloted by Alan Murray, with three passengers, came under fire. 'The aircraft was hit by a single bullet just forward of the right hand door which passed through the cabin and lodged in the main instrument panel.'[1] At the time, the aircraft was passing through 6,000 feet QNH. With no apparent damage or injuries, the flight continued to Charles Prince Airport. (Photo by Alan Murray)

A Browning machine gun was mounted on this tripod (later twin Brownings were mounted) and Les and I set out to try firing this weapon. We removed the starboard door with the idea of firing the gun below the starboard strut. There was no stop on this mounting to control the arc of fire. Close to the Centenary Airfield is a small dam, which we used as a target, specifically to enable us to gauge the accuracy of the sights.[3]

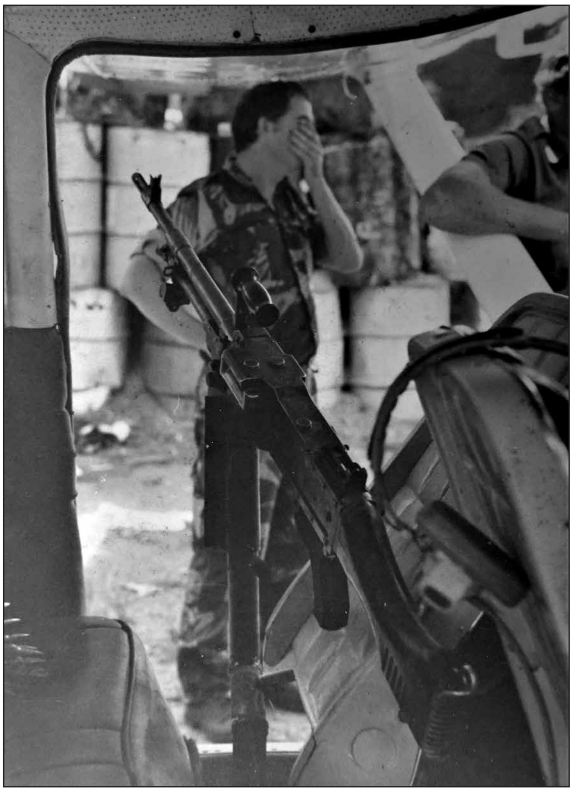
Les became so engrossed in aiming the weapon that he slightly overdid the arc and a bullet took a chunk out of the strut! We patched up the damage with some aluminium paste. I later flew VP-YXZ to Harare main for a service. Eric Churcher was horrified when he saw the damage, and immediately fitted a new strut. In our ignorance we thought the strut was a fairing covering a solid bar connecting the wing to the fuselage.[4]

The mounting was inspected by the police and once issues such as stop on the arc were addressed the fitting was authorised. Les relocated the gun to the port side which became the preferred fitting as it allowed both the pilot and gunner to 'keep eyes on' the target when flying a left-hand circuit.

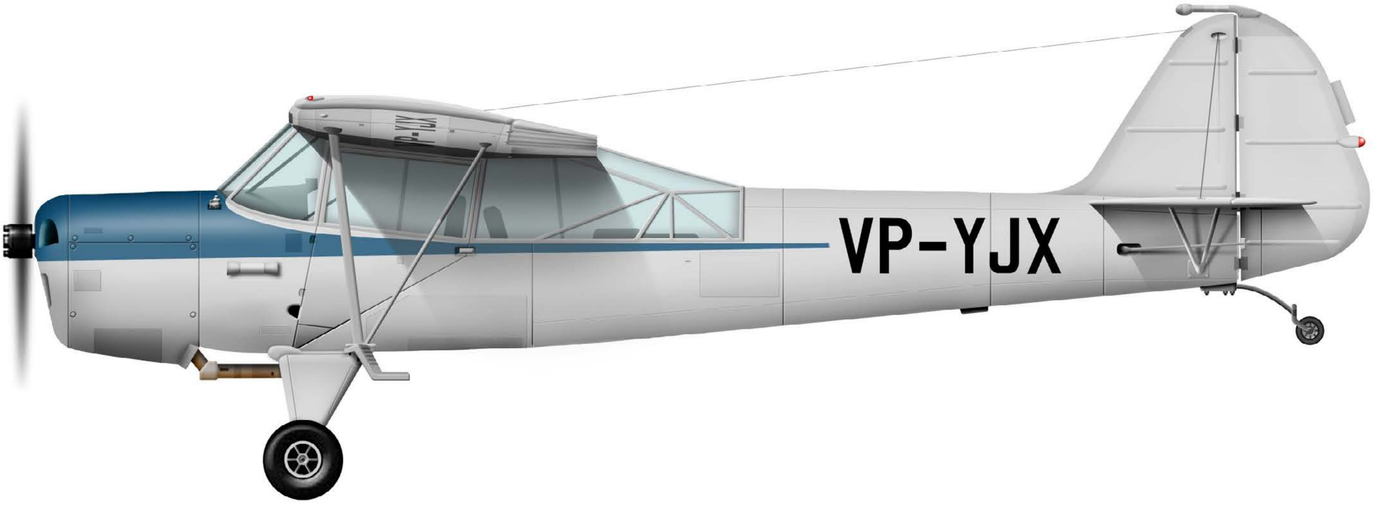
Gerry Cleveland managed to find the parts to repair a gun sight that was fitted to a Browning mounted on a tripod in a Cessna 206. The front



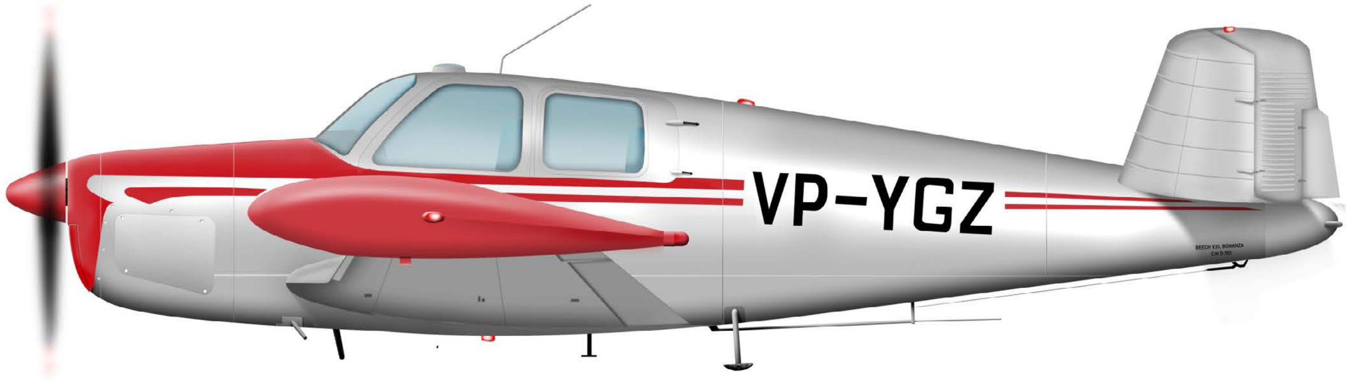
It is clear from this April 1978 image that pilots were very exposed to ground fire when in a standard attack profile of a port bank that was flown at 800 feet AGL and at as close as possible to 90 knots. He was also subject to the noise of the machine gun firing next to him. (Photo by Alan Murray)



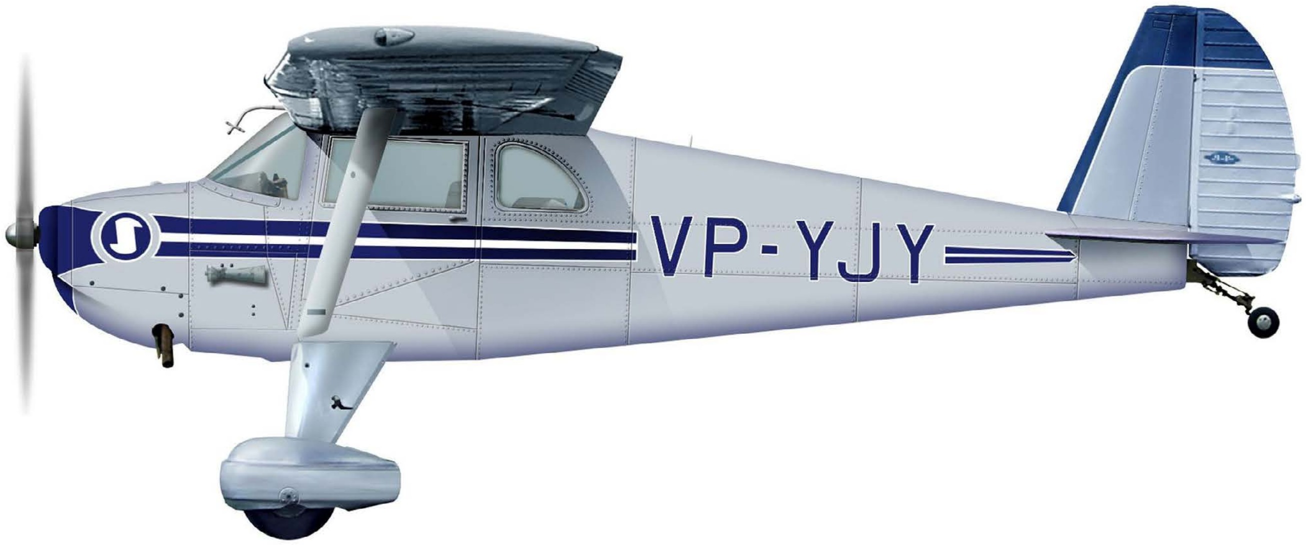
The rather cramped firing position and limited arc of fire from a position behind the pilot relied on good teamwork to achieve results. (Photo by Alan Murray)



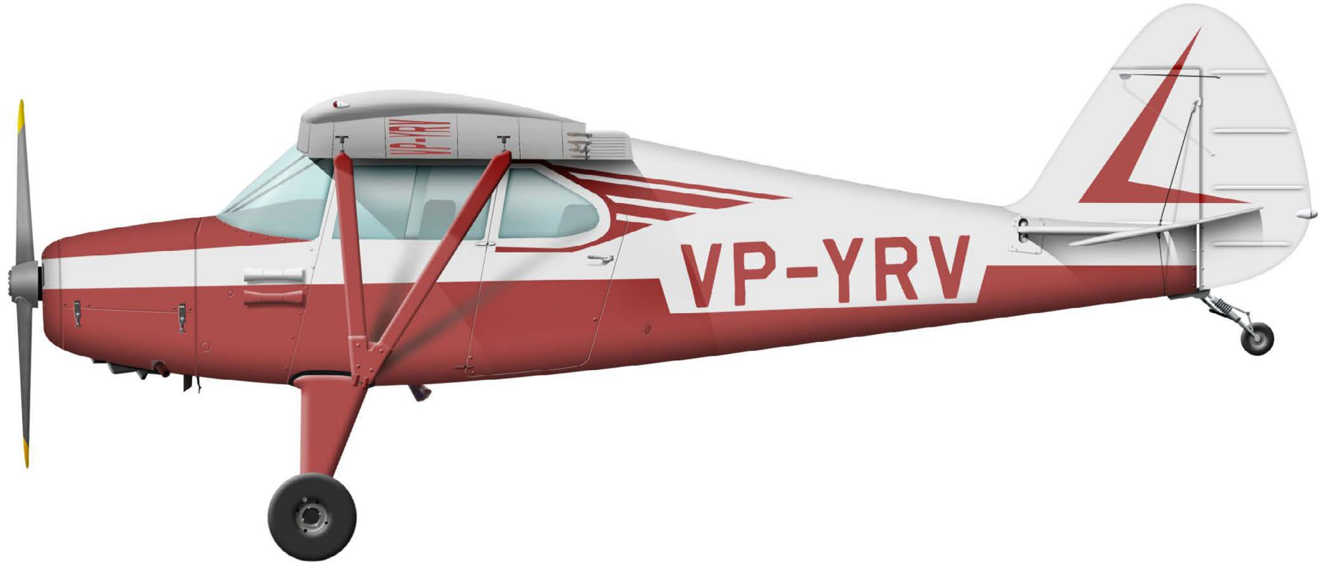
Registration VP-YJX was carried by the Auster A.O.P. Mk 5 construction number 2051, built in 1944. The aircraft served with the British Army as TW507, until de-militarised, in November 1949. In September 1952, it was transferred to Rhodesia and, in 1971, it was handed to PRO Peter Bell, who used it for PRAW work, as an element of the Mazoe Flight. (Artwork by Leon Manoucherians)



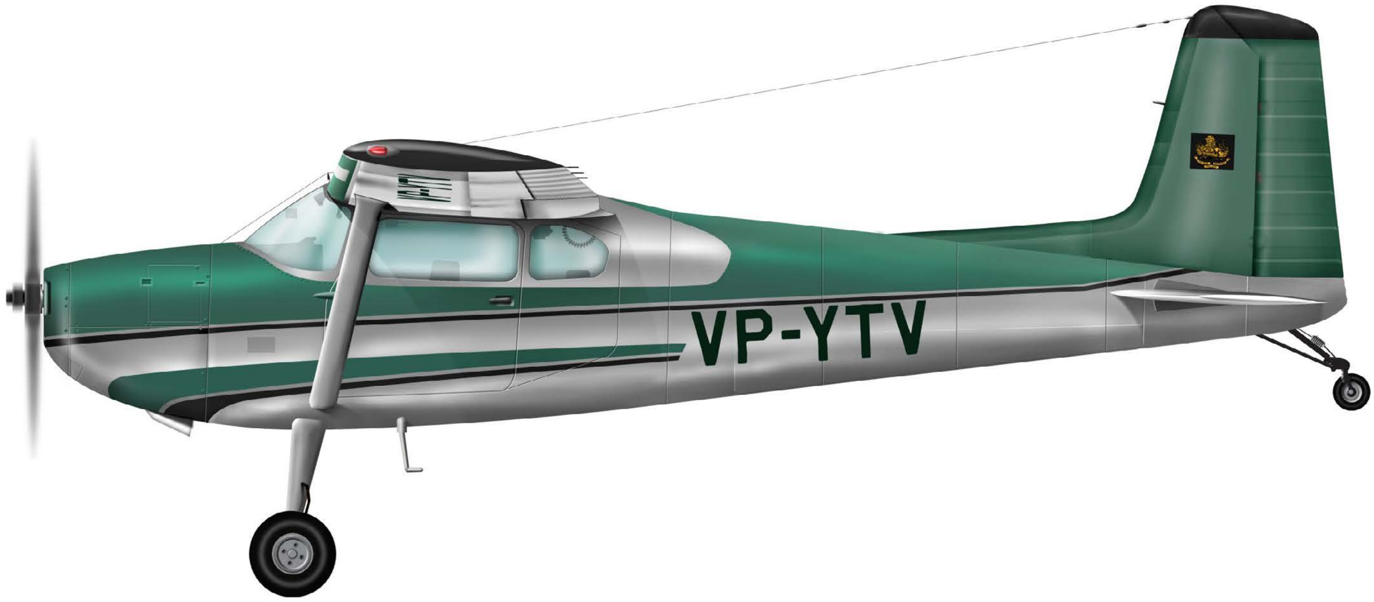
This Beech 35 Bonanza had the construction number D202. It was an early aircraft of the PRAW, deployed for development of operational procedures, imported and owned by ex-RAF pilot, Roy Smart, MBE. In 1959, it was sold to Bill Andres at Charles Prince Airport. (Artwork by Leon Manoucherians)



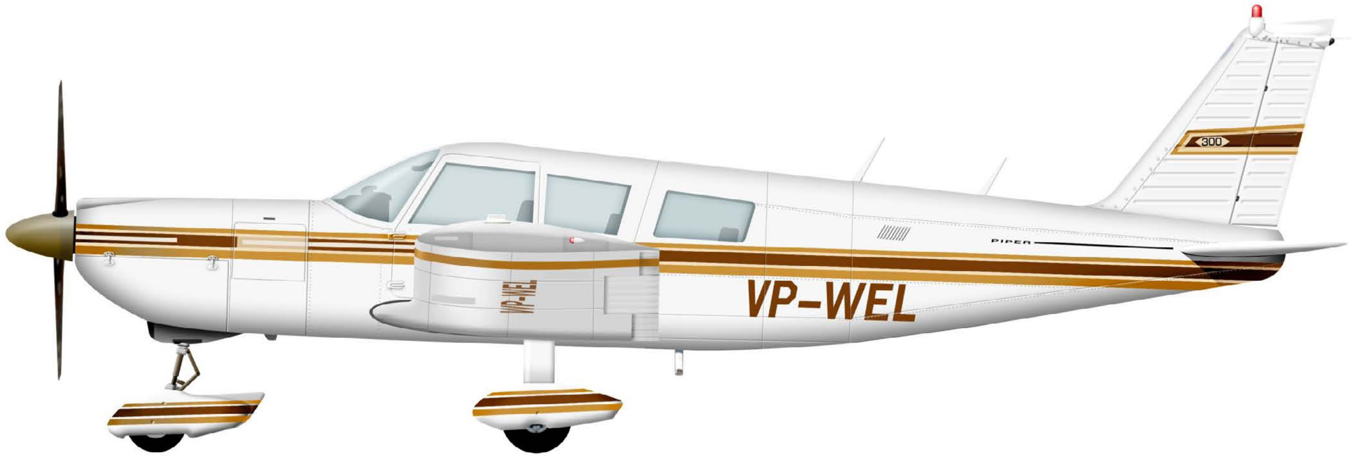
The Luscombe 8E Silvaire was imported from South Africa in 1952, and registered in Rhodesia as VP-YJY, owned by T. C. Woodforde. It was flown for PRAW while owned by Peter Scales from 1965 until 1975, when it was returned to South Africa as ZS-JKW. (Artwork by Leon Manoucherians)



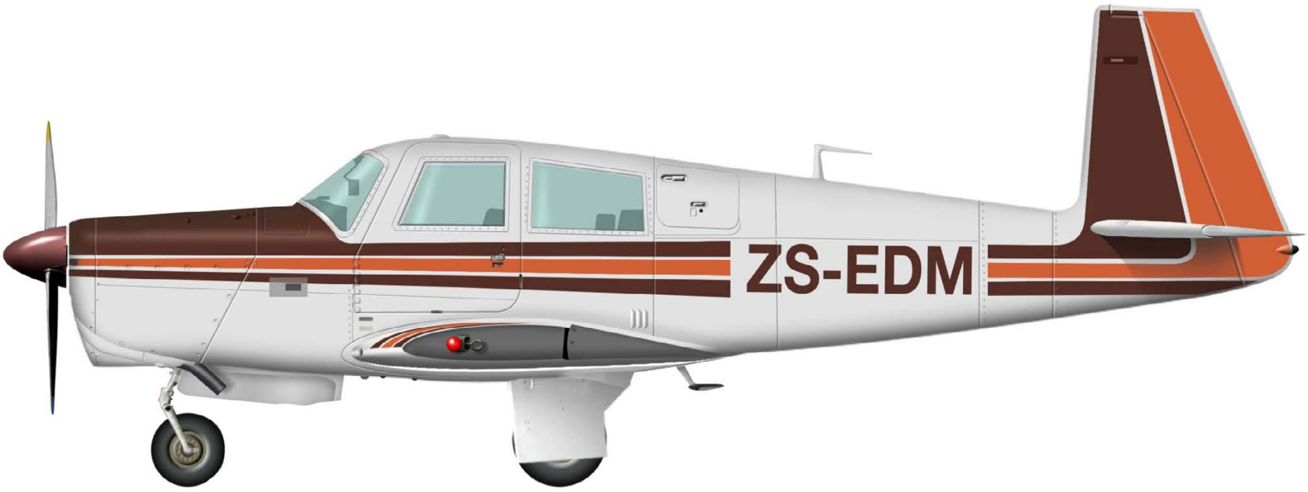
In 1960, this Piper PA-20-1235 Pacer was imported from South Africa while carrying the registration VP-YRV. In 1965, it was sold to an owner in Nyasaland (Malawi), but then returned to Rhodesia, later the same year. The new owner was Jim Aitken of Bindura, who joined PRAW and flew this pacer on police duties for nearly 10 years. (Artwork by Leon Manoucherians)



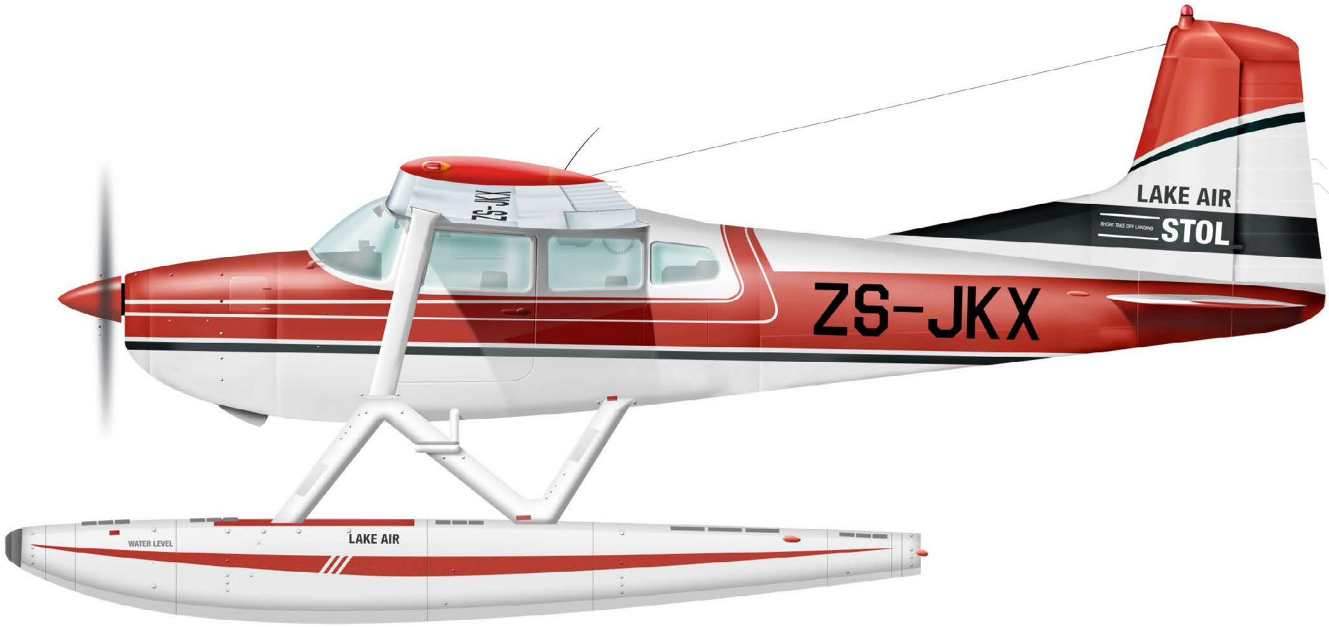
This Cessna 185 arrived in Rhodesia in January 1962, and was flown by Bill Ludgater of the Mazoe Flight. Originally wearing the registration VP-YTV, it became Z-YTV. (Artwork by Leon Manoucherians)



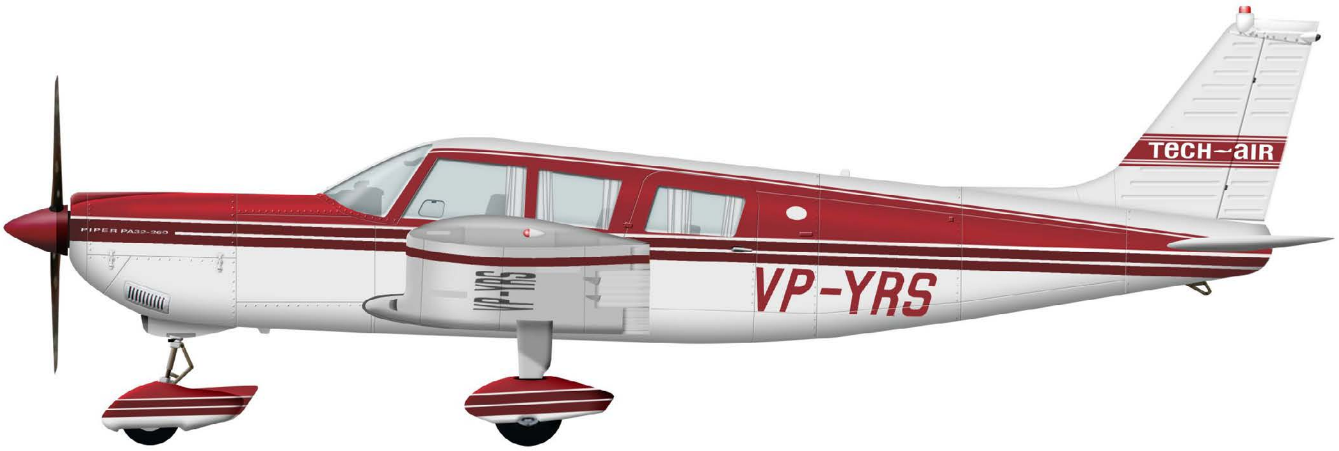
The Piper PA-32-300 Cherokee Six, registration VP-WEL, was the second aircraft flown by Roy and Shelagh Anderson as part of the PGHQ Flight, in which Roy was the Flight Commander. (Artwork by Leon Manoucherians)



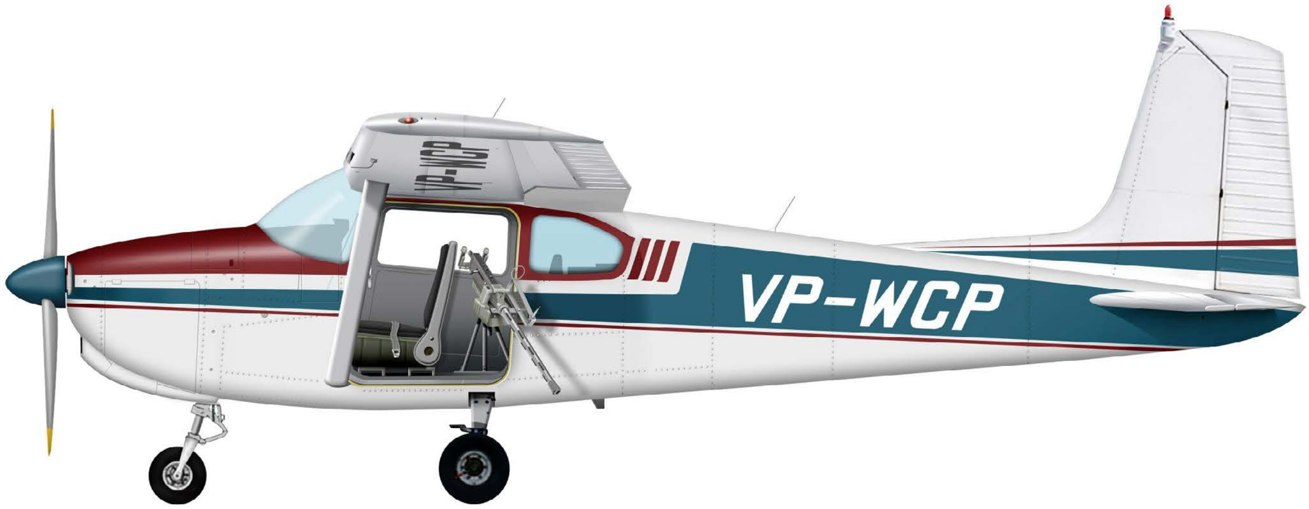
This Mooney M.20C Mark 21, registration ZS-EDM, was owned and flown on PRAW duties by John Tayler. It was a four-seater powered by a Lycoming 0-360-A1D, 180 horsepower engine. It wore the registration ZS-EDM until 1980, when it was reregistered as Z-WNX. In 1985, it was sold to Mutare (Umtali), where it remains at the time of writing. (Artwork by Leon Manoucherians)



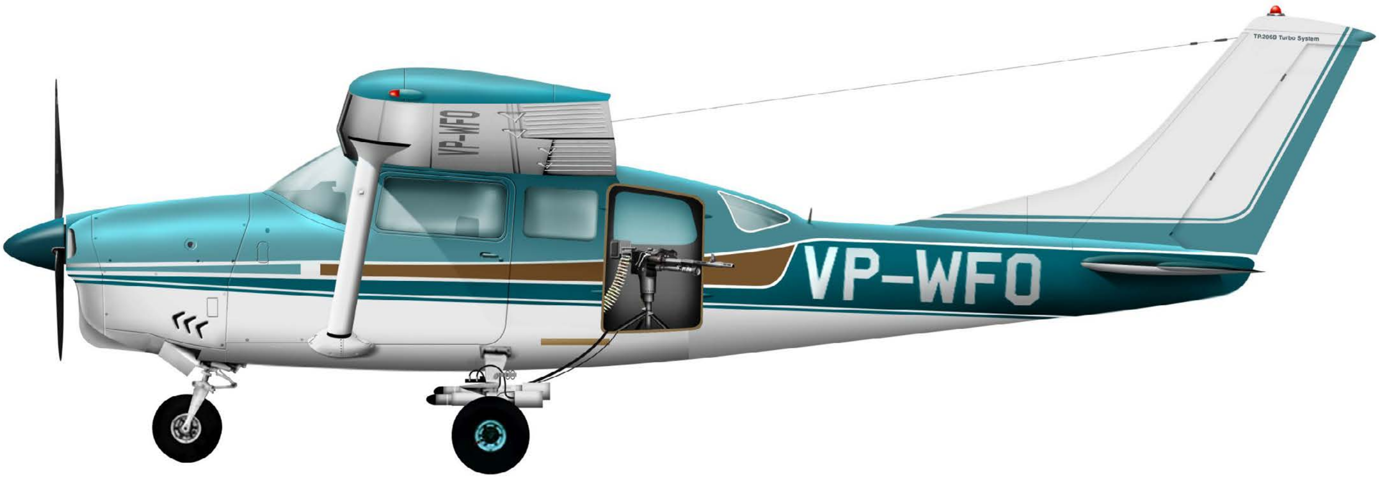
Pete Anderson imported this Cessna 185 with the registration ZS-JKX, and equipped it with floats for his *Lake Air* charter business, run on Lake Kariba. As an officer of the PRAW, Peter was called on for many of duties, from supply, to search and rescue missions all over and around the lake, and the surrounding bush. At times, the aircraft was equipped with a .303 machine gun installed in the rear cabin. (Artwork by Leon Manoucherians)



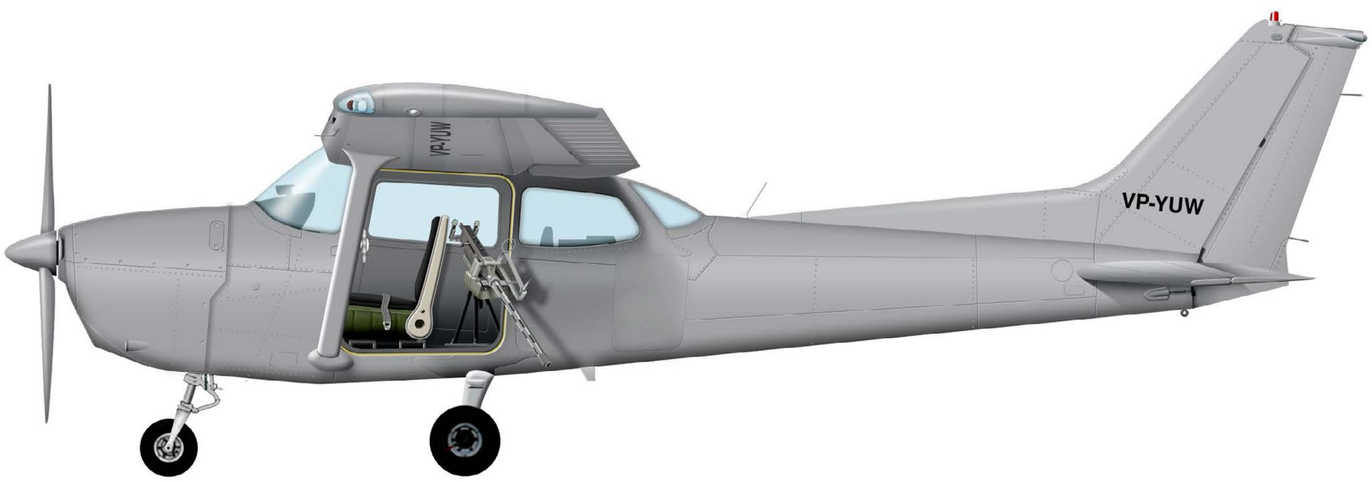
This Piper PA-32-260 Cherokee Six originally carried the registration ZS-ELE, and was operated by Roy and Shelagh Anderson and Solly Bematar. On 19 February 1973, while being flown by Geoff York, with Roy Anderson as observer, and four army officers on a visit to the Centenary area, it crashed on takeoff from Charles Prince Airport. The reason for the crash was insufficient airspeed: the pilot managed an emergency landing after avoiding obstacles at the end of the runway, preventing heavier damage. John Plan of Techair Ltd completely rebuilt the airframe and VP-YRS was still airworthy as of 1980. (Artwork by Leon Manoucherians)



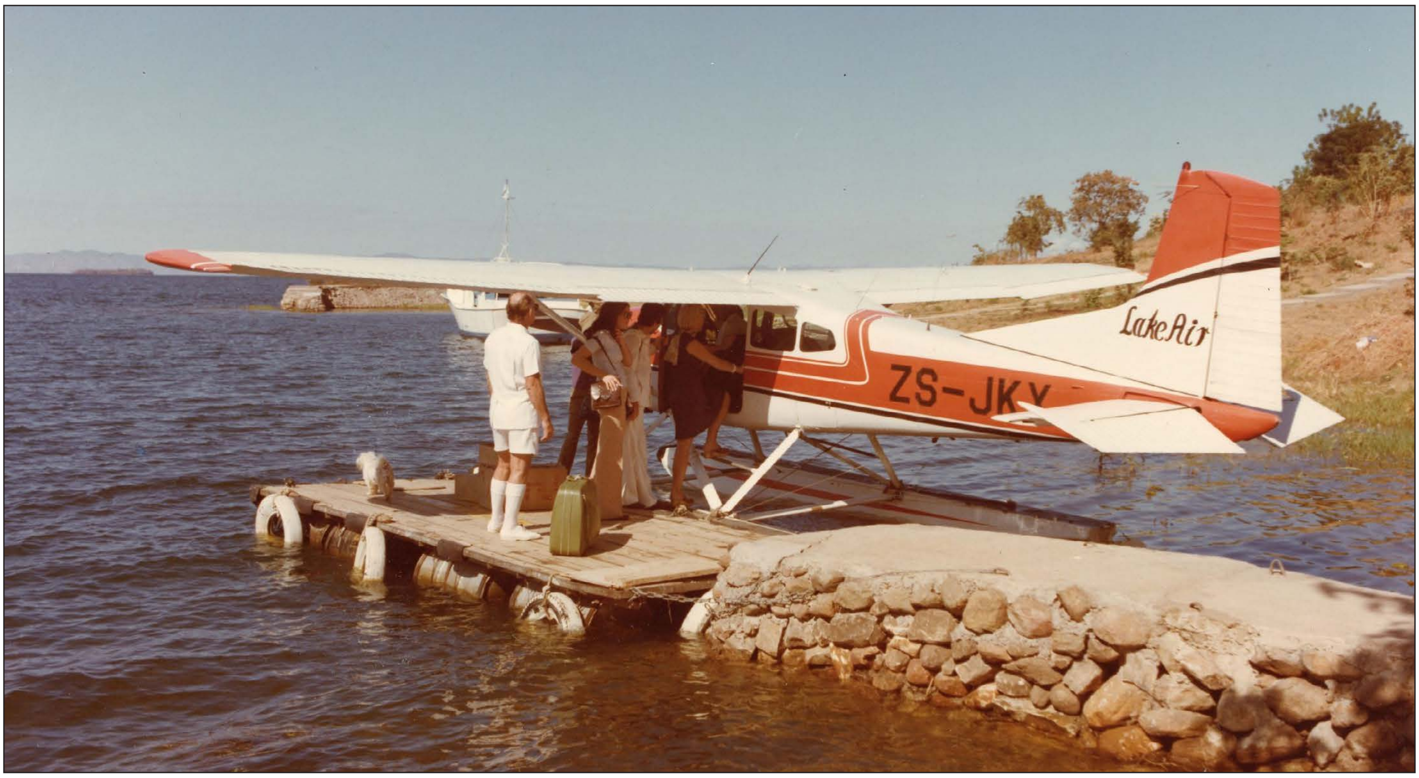
The Cessna 182A Skylane with registration VP-WCP was officially registered in 1968 to the Mashonaland Skydivers Club. It was deployed by the SALOPS Wing and armed with a Browning .303 calibre machine gun. (Artwork by Leon Manoucherians)



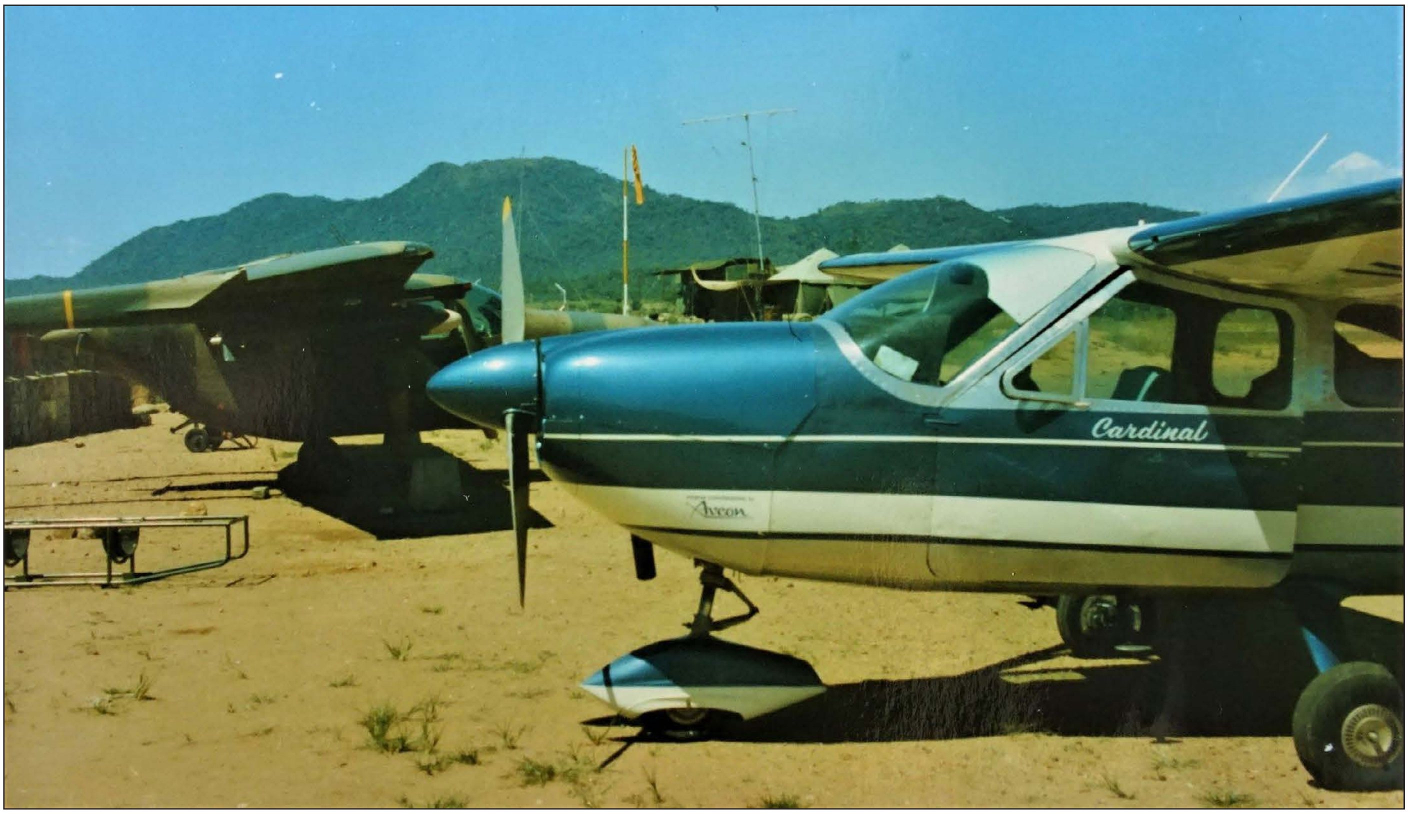
Cessna TP.206B Turbo with registration VP-WFO was owned by PRP's 'Buster' Brown and Rod Bater. It became well-known for photographs detailing its armament comprising machine guns and homemade bombs attached to the undercarriage. In PRAW service, it was primarily flown by Ian Pringle and Tony Mann (who also operated the Cessna 206 with registration ZS-ZGZ of the SALOPS Flight). (Artwork by Leon Manoucherians)



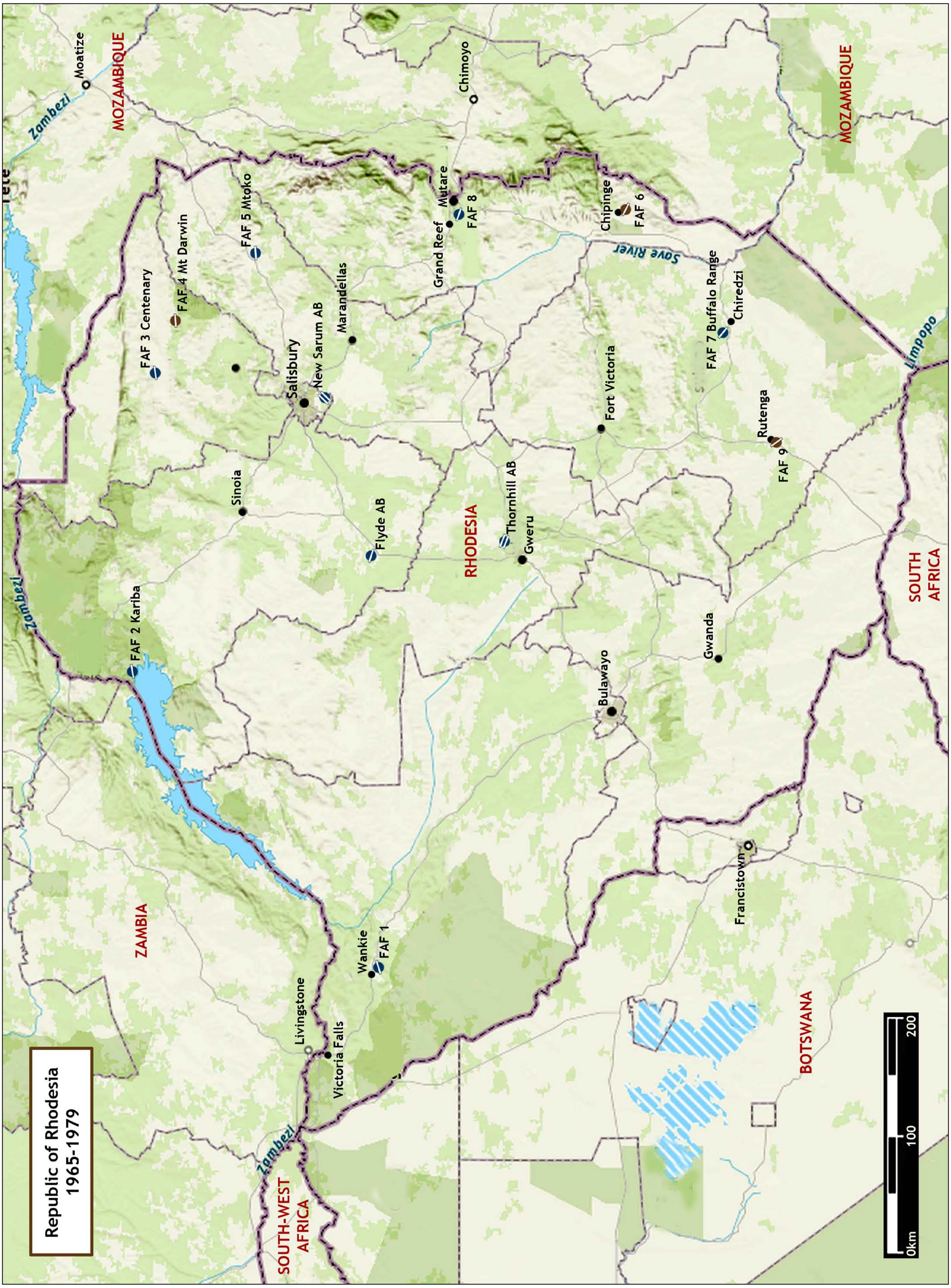
The Cessna 172D Skyhawk with registration VP-YUW was first imported to Rhodesia in 1962 and owned by various parties until purchased by Peter Marchujssen. It is shown here as at the peak of the conflict in 'anti-Strela' grey overall colour scheme, with a small national registration on the tail only. (Artwork by Leon Manoucherians)



Passengers boarding Pete Anderson's Lake Air Cessna 185 Float Plane ZS-JKX on their way to one of the resorts around Lake Kariba. (Photo by Peter Anderson)



Civilian and military aircraft wait alongside each other for the next call out from a less developed FAF. Visible in the background is one of the Rhodesian Air Forces Cessna FB.337s. The pilot's door on the Cessna 177 Cardinal with registration VP-WEE was left ajar to allow some heat to escape. (Photo by Alan Murray)


Republic of Rhodesia
1965-1979
MOZAMBIQUE
Moatize
Zambezi
Chimoyo
Mutare
FAF 8
Grand Reef
Chipinge
FAF 6
Save River
MOZAMBIQUE
FAF 3 Centenary
FAF 4 Mt Darwin
FAF 5 Mtoko
Marandellas
New Sarum AB
Salisbury
FAF 7 Buffalo Range
Chiredzi
Limpopo
Fort Victoria
Rutenga
FAF 9
Sinoia
Flyde AB
Thornhill AB
Gweru
RHODESIA
SOUTH AFRICA
Zambezi
FAF 2 Kariba
Gwanda
Bulawayo
Francistown
ZAMBIA
Wankie
FAF 1
Livingstone
Victoria Falls
Zambezi
SOUTH-WEST AFRICA
BOTSWANA
0km
100
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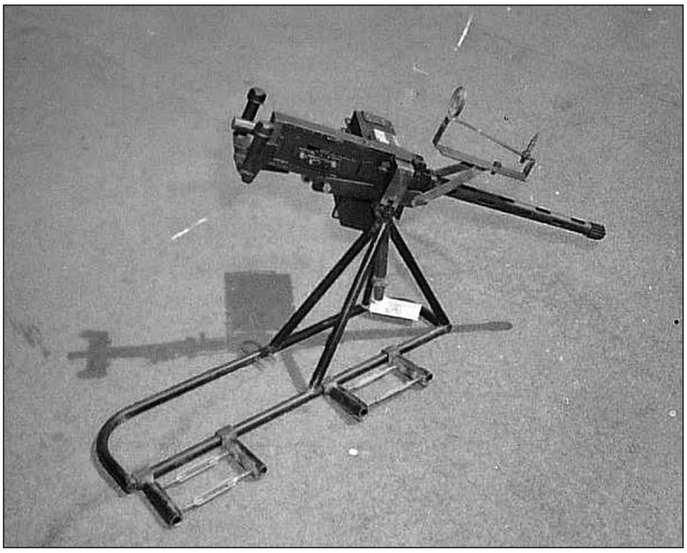
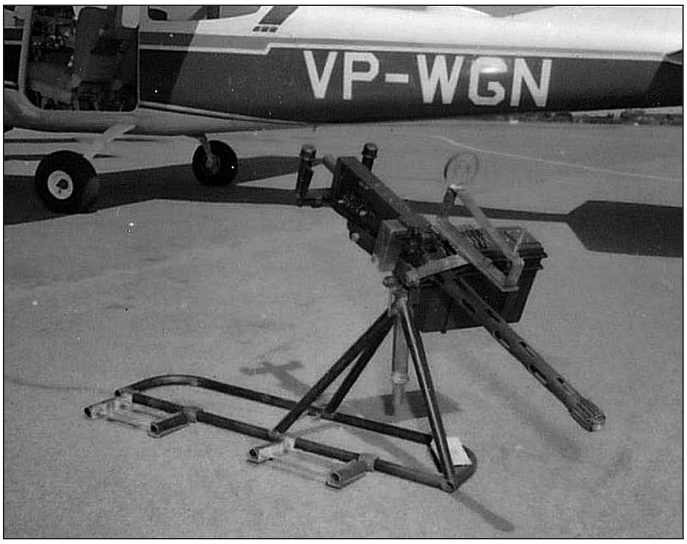
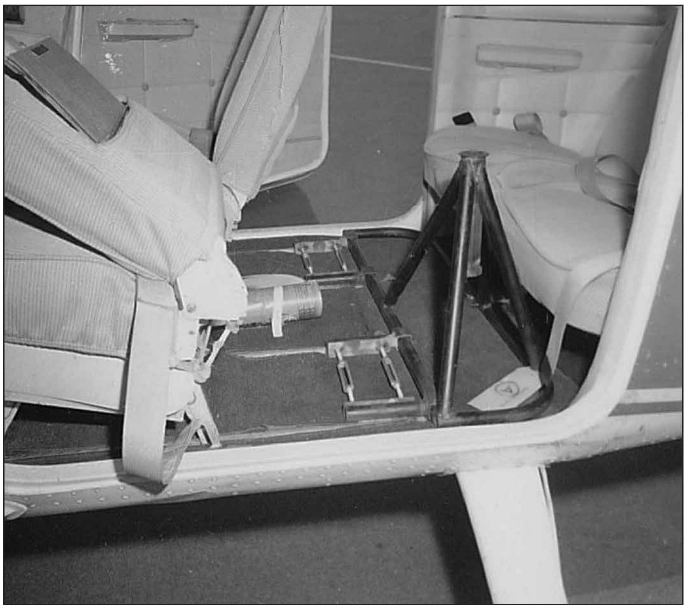
Republic of Rhodesia, 1965–1979



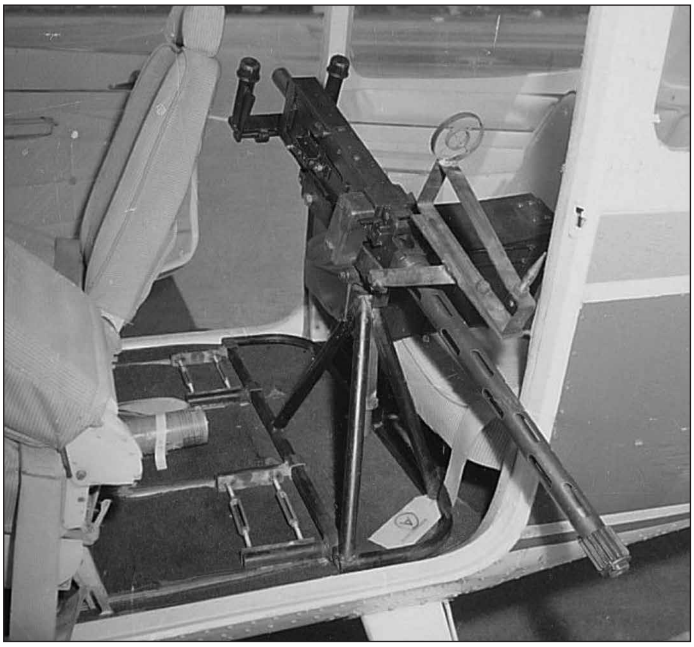
The tubular construction on which a Browning machine gun is mounted with on the right tubes that slipped into fittings on the floor of the aircraft. (Photo by Keith Holshausen)



A mounted Browning machine gun ready to be installed in Cessna Skylane 182G VP-WGN. An 'after-market' ring sight has been welded to the weapon. (Photo by Keith Holshausen)



The Jellicoe type tripod installed in VP-WGN. Note the modified wire fence tensioners used to secure the mounting to the extended runner. (Photo by Keith Holshausen)



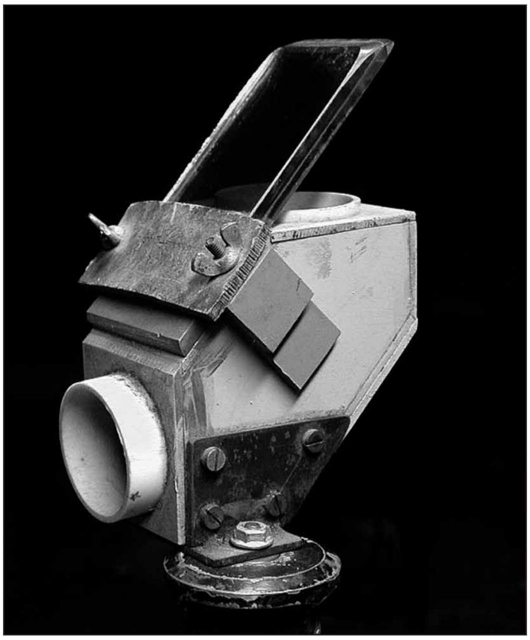
The Browning machine gun is mounted onto the secured fitting. An ammunition box is on the seat and mounted above the barrel of the gun is the homemade sight. (Photo by Keith Holshausen)

section of the two starboard cargo doors of the Cessna 206 was removed and the rear door was closed and locked. The gun-mount was fitted to the seat rails in place of the removed right-rear, middle seat. Observer/gunner, Paul Chappe, sat on the middle, port side seat, and the pilot sat in the co-pilot's position to be able to look in the same direction as the gun pointed.

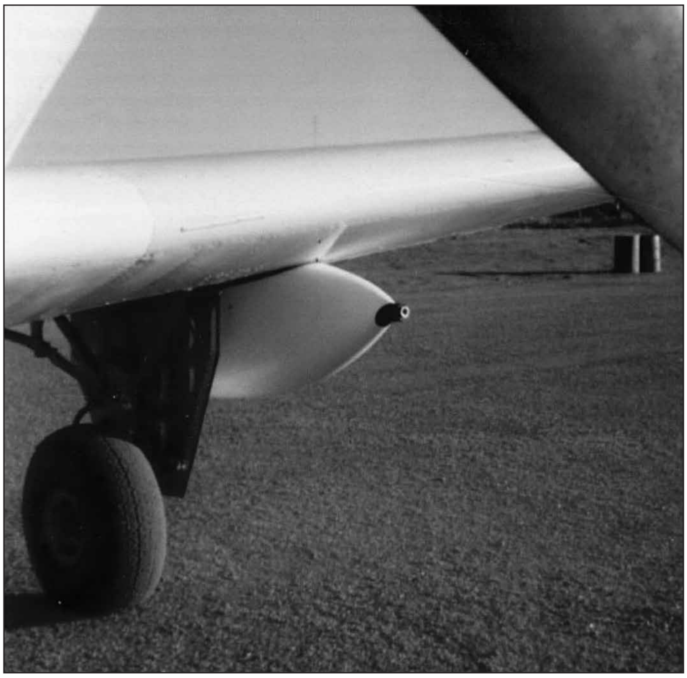
Some cadet experience firing Browning and Bren guns and an armaments refresher course were enough for Arnold Woolley to fly, on occasion, as a gunner for Neville Pritchard. The aircraft, a Reims Cessna FR.172J Rocket VP-WIF, was fitted with a machine gun mounted laterally behind the front seat and was fired out of the port side. Like many PRAW crews, Neville preferred a left-hand orbit. There was no protection, or safety harness for the gunner who simply sat behind the floor mounted weapon, fitted with arc limiters to protect the airframe, and hung on to the Browning.

The .303 calibre weapon had been modified to take the standard 7.62 rounds. Gunners had to be adept at clearing jams under pressure. The method adopted by Pritchard was to find the target and then establish a tight orbit around its centre. One in five shots was tracer rounds and these allowed the pilot to adjust his angle and flight path to maximise the effect of the gunner's efforts.

Cessna 180H N9013M, owned by Chris Thorne, was fitted with a Browning .303 machine gun, which had a firing rate of 600 rounds per minute. The weapon was attached to a mounting, which was installed on the pilot seat rail and fired out of the doorway with the door removed. Stops were welded to the gun mounting which prevented the gun traversing too far up, down, or to the right. On the wing strut, Chris had wound some insulation tape and this was his sight for the gunner. In a left-hand orbit, Chris would hold the strut mark over the target, knowing his crewmember would be able to see and attack forces on the ground. Chris and observer John Revill had refined this idea through trial and error, using wooden planks floating on a small dam. An attack on the ground was flown from 800 feet AGL and at as close as possible to 90 knots. 2,000 belted rounds, personal FN rifles, an armoured seat and long-range fuel tanks providing six hours endurance, added to the weight of the aircraft. The observer/gunner simply sat on the ammunition boxes. On board were Mills grenades stored in an armoured box. There was



To build a reflective gun sight Gerry Cleveland scrounged a broken prismatic sight from 7 Squadron as a pattern to make the sight pictured here. Gerry and Chief Inspector Fred Pringle scoured Salisbury's stationery shops and bought all the 2-inch convex magnifying glasses they could find, and went to PG Glass for the half-silvered mirrors. The original version was made from PVC tubing and sheeting all glued together with PVC weld adhesive. The front aperture (white tube) housed the "cross hairs." The National Archives photographically made a graticule by drawing a black circle with cross hairs on a piece of white card, then photographing it and using the negative. This provided the see-through sight on a black background. The 2-inch magnifying glass was fixed into the vertical white tube that you see just under the half-silvered mirror, which in turn was held onto the PVC sight body by a tempered hardboard strap and wing nuts. There was a "front" silvered mirror fixed onto the 45-degree backplate of the sight. The front silvered mirrors were made in home workshops using a silver nitrate solution. Gerry and Paul Chappe took the prototype to the RhAF and after some scepticism, the technicians showed them how to collimate the sight and to set up the lead and droop angles. Once fitted to the Browning and installed in the aircraft, adjustments were made. At Charles Prince Airport, with the cooperation of Des Anderson and Les Thorogood the ATC, they parked the Cessna 206 on the non-active runway 14/32 and adjusted the sight against a person standing about 800ft down the runway. (Photo by Gerry Cleveland)



Watson Bonanza under wing guns
The guns were laid on their sides, which not only allowed easy opening of the breeches, but also facilitated the ejection of the spent cartridges through a slot in the side of the pod, as well as the gathering of the belt links in the bottom of the pod, which were then re-used. Ammunition trays that were recessed into the wings held 600 rounds. (Photo by Hugh Bomford)

a three-second delay from pulling the pin and detonation; timing was critical. Chris reported that 'a rapid burst of fire of four to five seconds would push the tail of the aircraft out of the orbit, which then had to be re-established.'

Rudimentary bombs were developed, with delivery methods reminiscent of the First World War. A hole was made in the floor by the co-pilots seat on Bonanza VP-WHM, through which grenades could be dropped. Post war, his son Andrew Watson wrote:

> The grenades were stored in steel tubes in a removable armoured box right behind the pilot and observer, directly over the C of G (Centre of Gravity). All pins were removed from the grenades; the handles were held in place by the walls of the tube. The tube was blocked on both ends by means of two large steel pins, and when in position locked in place by split pins (re-used from the grenades). A spring-loaded cap was fitted to the top end of the tube.
>
> At the required time the resin plug, covering the hole in the cockpit floor, was removed and the tube attached over the hole and locked in place. The top pin was removed causing the spring-loaded cap to exert pressure on the grenades. A cable was attached to the bottom pin by means of a dog-leash clip. On final approach to the target, the bottom safety pin was removed. Once over the target, the cable was pulled, removing the bottom pin, causing the spring-loaded cap to force the grenades from the tube. A further safety device was available and

Beechcraft Bonanza V35A VP-WHM was fitted with underwing Browning machine guns and a chute in the cockpit from which hand grenades were dropped. (Photo by Andrew Watson)

> used in the event of a 'hang-up' in the tube. I had to use it on two separate occasions. While not very scientific it worked. Dad would hold the aircraft very steady, and I would carefully remove the spring-loaded cap, take a small pole, and push the hung-up grenades out the tube.[5]

Further modifications to the aircraft were made when Robin Watson, Copper 192, had Matabele Air in Bulawayo, who followed T-34 Mentor manuals, fit a Browning machine gun under each wing. Andrew said that:

> The guns are not all that apparent – they were in pods, beside the wheel wells. Firing was via solenoids, which were activated by a push-to-talk button on the control column. The sighting mechanism was quite simple, yet effective. A foldout arm with a ring sight on it was snapped into place. A dot on the windshield provided the second reference – line up the dot in the ring, put both on the target and press the trigger. The combination of guns and grenades worked well. A strafing run followed by grenades would discourage those insurgents who stood up to fire on the aircraft as it passed.

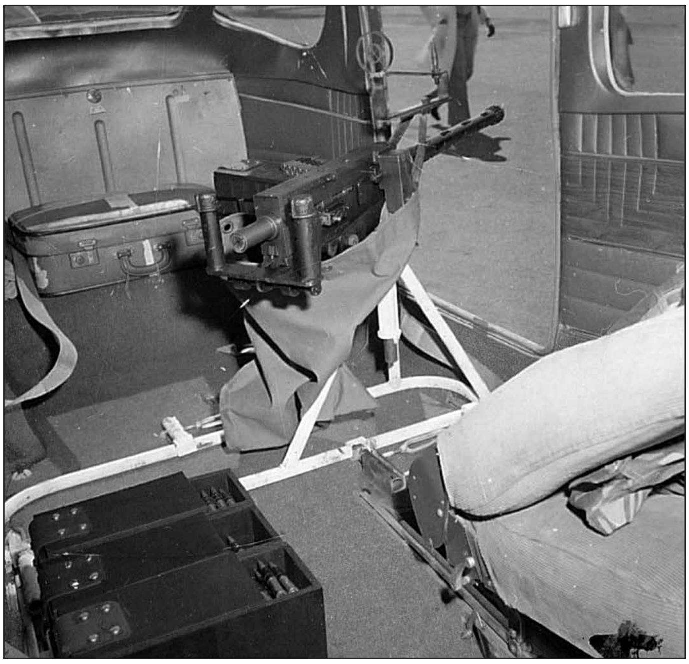
For a time, Dave Ward was based at the Watson farm running BSAP Ground Coverage Operators. He recalled:

> I flew with him [Robin Watson] because I could spot and probably operate the grenade tube. On reported sightings off we went. I did let the tube [the grenade launcher] go once which was a little scary and did indeed notice the feel of when the guns get fired but we were late onto a sighting and no results, Robin's staff brought in reports and would act without communication with us which led to some ground rules being established for safety. The last thing I needed was a Reservist (PRAW) and civilians being involved in same forces punch up.
>
> My mortars were also there to protect that aircraft. I needed to establish the understanding with locals or mujibas that if Terrs thought they could get close then they would die so probably putting 60mm mortar to its limits I would add in 3 little boosters. We never had issues of ranch attacks or aircraft hangar attacks as long as we aggressively patrolled and exaggerated our strength.
>
> I also flew with Tony Browne when I was at boarding school in Gwelo. On occasional days out in 1973 and 1974 Tony took me flying as he put himself through safety training and some emergency procedures all of which I really enjoyed and took as free education.[6]

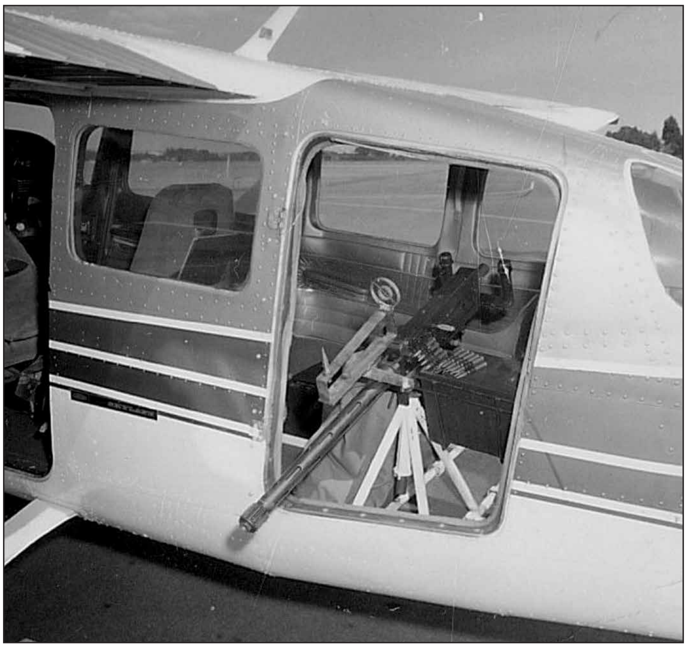
Aggressive air support was often effective. Farmer John Tayler recalled that

> during the harvest of our cotton and maize crops, we were attacked by ZANLA Terrorists. The homestead came under small arms and rifle grenade fire and the compound was set alight and all our labour chased away. Our neighbour Peter Marchussen, a PRAW pilot, got airborne at approximately midnight, circled over the homestead firing his Browning, which broke off the attack. Within days the Doma Farming Community rebuilt my compound, harvested my crops, and delivered them to the market.[7]

Cessna 210 Turbo Centurion ZS-JUM, owned by Brian van Buuren was never armed, but he did deploy custom-made bombs. An armaments technician built some airburst devices, which initially contained normal mining explosive and magnesium to create a big bang and a flash. Later models had 4-inch nails fashioned into the tail unit. When the Leopard Rock Hotel in the Vumba Mountains was attacked in January 1978, Brian and his observer Tony Davis were woken by the Agric Alert system. They met at the hangar and, using the landing lights, took off and were soon overhead the hotel. Flying at 2,000 feet, Tony handed Brian a bomb, who opened his window, held the bomb outside, pulled a pin, which made an alarming cracking sound as it lit a safety fuse, and then he let it drop. The resulting explosion and bright light drove off the attackers. On each of the three times the bombs were dropped, the ground attacks were terminated immediately.

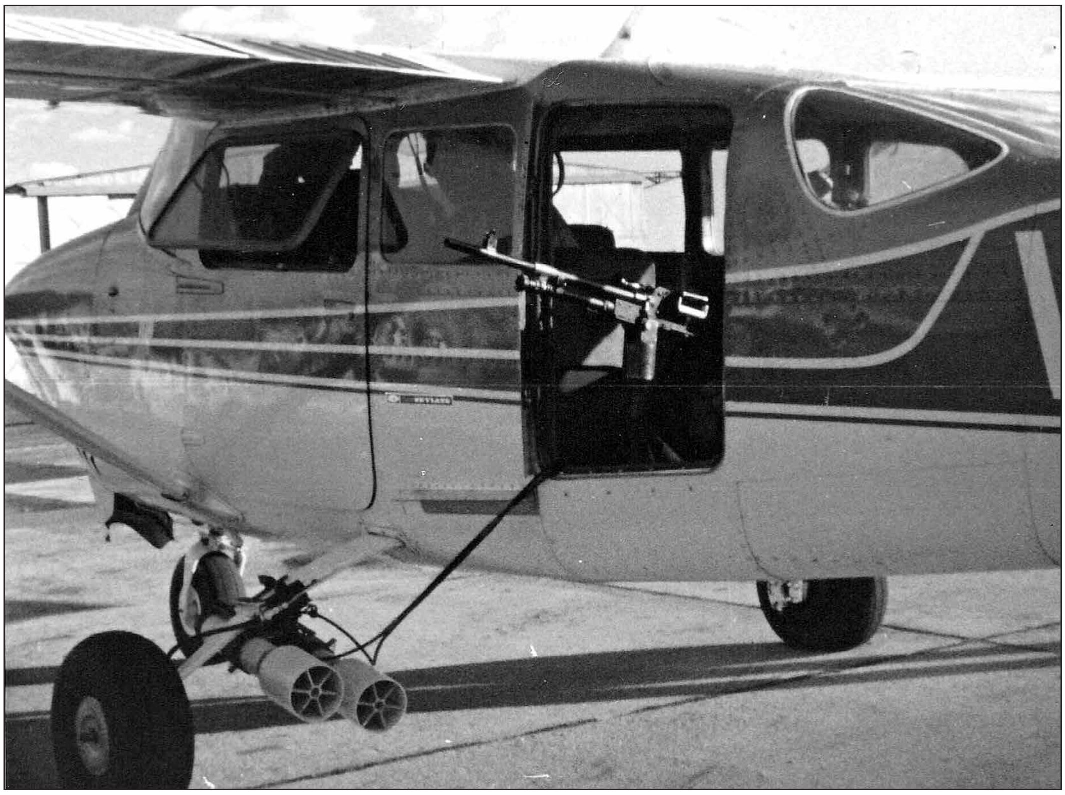


For aircraft with a rear door, such as Cessna TP.206B Turbo VP-WFO, a fitting was developed for a weapon firing out of the rear door opening. Under the machine gun is a cartridge catcher and alongside are three ammunition boxes, prepared and easily at hand when required. (Photo by Keith Holshausen)



In this external view of the fitting in VP-WFO, the weapon has been loaded ready for cocking and action. (Photo by Keith Holshausen)

A more sophisticated bomb delivery arrangement was fitted to VP-WFO. Ian Pringle provided this write up of the mechanism:


Cessna TP.206B Turbo VP-WFO is shown with the standard side-firing MAG light machine gun of 7.62 calibre. 2,500 rounds of belted ammunition were carried in five separate boxes along with a spare barrel for the weapon. On the undercarriage are the anti-personnel bombs described in the text. (Photo by Tony Mann)

> There were two anti-personnel bombs, the casings, nose, and tailfins made from Prodorite PVC, attached to a bracket on the undercarriage leg. Two cables ran down from the door to the bomb rack. In the cabin, there were two little bomb levers with three positions: neutral, armed, release. When arming, a spring-loaded interdictor was moved through 90 degrees to open, like a bayonet-fitting light bulb. When the bomb was released, this allowed the interdictor to pop out thus clearing the way for the firing pin to detonate when it hit the ground. The firing pin was activated by a long proboscis (about two feet), to detonate the bomb above the ground. Shrapnel, in the form of many sharp pieces of metal, were packed around the explosive casing.
>
> A very crude bombsight was fashioned out of clear heavy Perspex. Below the doorsill was a horizontal bracket to hold the rectangular strip of Perspex on which calibrations marked the ideal release point. On the range, we would test this at 850ft AGL. The ideal setting was recorded and later marked with a marking pen. The sight was usually also calibrated for 1,000ft AGL, to allow for altitude over uneven ground.
>
> The bomb run was made in straight and level flight at 85 knots, which of course made the aircraft highly vulnerable to ground fire. It was essential to keep the plane level, which meant using rudder and opposite aileron for corrections. The bomb was only effective close to a person, which was hard to achieve. But it made a hell of a bang, which had some effect.[8]

Because on the run in the target was not visible and by the nature of the conflict the enemy were always on the move, Ian stopped using the bombs, finding the gun far more effective.

It was reported by Tony Mann that WFO was hit by ground fire up to 40 times and sustained some damage that required airframe repairs. He wrote that the bombs:

> were an attempt to provide an economical but effective anti-personnel device. They were manufactured by a local engineering company and the shrapnel was in fact the "waste" from an industrial machine employed to stamp steel washers and their appearance was that of a square with a semi-circular portion removed from two opposing sides. This resulted in a small steel plate of around 3cm width with a very sharp point at each corner. If you can now imagine a projectile of this nature being propelled at high velocity, you will appreciate that the lack of any aerodynamic attributes dictates that it will tumble throughout its flight and in so doing, it creates its own unique sound. The detonating probe was designed in such a manner that the bomb would explode slightly above ground level and scatter these devices over a radius of around 100 metres.
>
> Having witnessed the testing of these bombs, both from the air and at ground level (from a safe distance obviously), I can assure you that the noise they produced was quite awesome. The initial explosion was extremely loud, and this was followed by an eerie wailing sound as several hundred scimitar-like projectiles were scattered far and wide. Dozens of these bombs were dropped over our testing range in our efforts to determine an efficient aiming system other than the rather crude optical device which was attached to the side of the aircraft and through which the machine-gunner would endeavour to guess where they would land. Such was the inadequacy that the only occasion on which I personally used the bombs in an operational situation, served rather to frighten some nearby cows than halt the enemy.[9]

Air Lake's Cessna floatplane ZS-JKX, on Lake Kariba, was fitted with a .303 Browning machine gun mounted on a removable fitting made by Brian Stevens. When in place the left-hand door was removed, and wires fitted to limit the arc of fire and ensure the strut and float were not hit. Plenty of practice took place over the water but the gun was only used once in anger.

For duty with the SALOPS Wing, Cessna 206 ZS-ZGZ was armed with a weapon firing from the right. The two standard front seats were retained but also fitted with bulletproof pans to afford some form of protection to the two crew members. All remaining seats were removed from the aircraft together with the front cargo door. The gun mounting was installed adjacent to the cargo door opening and the design was such that it could be easily accommodated within the existing Cessna seat rail assembly. A single MAG machine gun was fitted to the mount, which also incorporated a bulletproof plate positioned in front of the weapon. This plate, together with the gun, is evident in the photo.

The separate gunner's seat (also of bulletproof construction) was installed behind the gun and again utilised the standard seat rails for its attachment points. The uppermost portion of this seat assembly is also evident in the photo. Ammunition for the weapon was carried in five separate boxes, with each box containing 600 belted rounds, making a total of 3,000 rounds. In the case of the U206, it was necessary for the ammunition boxes to be accommodated at the very rear of the aircraft and these can be seen in the photo immediately in front of the rear cargo door, next to and aft of the gunner's seat. This amount of ammunition represented a considerable weight, and it is for this reason that ZGZ is depicted very tail-low attitude – only when the crew got up front did the weight and balance become more respectable. A spare barrel for the weapon was also always carried and most gunners were very adept at exchanging an overheated barrel during a contact. It is also worth mentioning that I recall more than a few occasions where in we would return from a three or four hour sortie with absolutely no ammunition remaining.

It was also possible to equip the aircraft with anti-personnel bombs, which were mounted in pairs on the undercarriage legs of the C206. The bombs were released individually and were designed to detonate approximately a metre above ground level with an effective shrapnel radius of around 50 metres. Their detonation was extremely loud and easily audible above the noise of the aircraft even when wearing a standard flying helmet. I always maintained that they probably served to terrify the enemy into a state of submission rather than anything else!

In addition, a grenade pod could also be mounted on the underbelly of the aircraft utilising the same attachment points as those pertaining to the standard Cessna cargo pod. This grenade device was of a rather ingenious design and accommodated a total of 40 grenades of either the "white phosphorous" or "tear gas" variety with the grenades being electrically dispatched in banks of 10 as and when required.

14

PRAW Service

Colonial Service

On two occasions, the Air Wing operated in Nyasaland/Malawi. A small contingent was called in during the 1959 emergency to assist the Nyasaland Police control the nationalist inspired unrest. They were used to courier officials, act as radio relays, and to perform message dropping. One of the pilots was Peter Scales, who flew a total of 8 hours 20 minutes over the Blantyre/Zomba region. After independence, the 'Cabinet Crisis' of 1964 saw government ministers rebel against the Prime Minister, Dr Banda. One of the ministers, Harry Chipembere led a small, unsuccessful, armed uprising and shortly afterwards, to defuse the situation, he agreed to leave the country. A highly secret British/US sponsored evacuation took place. On the evening of 26 April 1965, hidden in a Police Force Land Rover, Chipembere was moved to Zomba. The first thing the next morning, he and his police escort, Mr Denton, boarded a PRAW aircraft that had arrived the day before. They taxied to the end of the runway, where Chipembere climbed out to relive himself before takeoff. On arrival in Salisbury, Rhodesia, the aircraft taxied into a hangar, and the doors were closed. Chipembere was moved to a safe house and that night on false, British supplied documents, he flew into exile on a commercial flight bound for London.

POLICE RESERVE AIR WING

This unknown PRAW pilot was photographed in an early model Cessna 210 and appeared on the cover of the July 1961 issue of *The Outpost Magazine*. (*The Outpost Magazine*)

Techair's aircraft were often hired by PRAW, as the company was based at Mount Hampden/Charles Prince Airport close to Salisbury. This is a view from the rear seat of Piper Aztec VP-WDE with a PRAW pilot in the left-hand seat. (Photo by Keith Holshausen)

Courier Flights

From the start, PRAW acted as an airborne taxi service, ferrying personnel from all branches of the security services from one location to another. At times police dogs were transported to follow up on serious crimes. Wally Barton recalled, ‘I had as passengers all ranks from generals to prisoners and flew into the most remote and varied airstrips some barely qualifying as landing grounds. Supply drops were a common task and generally involved some interesting flying while making drops in the Zambezi escarpment.’[2]

Access to aircraft improved the efficiency of the BSAP. *The Outpost Magazine* of March 1958 headlined the occasion ‘The Dawn of a New Era.’ It noted that the training carried out in 1957 had proved how PRAW could support ground forces. The article reported that developments in the Wing had shown that it was a valuable aid to the regular force.

The magazine noted that:

> Remote stations whose radio installations became defective had, in the past, to wait long periods before the defect was remedied and communications re-established. Now they are finding that radio equipment and a radio mechanic are being flown in by air with a minimum of delay, to carry out this essential work. For example, in December 1957 Que Que, Gwelo and Shabani were checked in one day, in January 1958 Bindura, Sinoia and Doma were visited and repairs done in one day, and in February 1958, Kariba and Bindura were visited, and radios repaired in one day under conditions which, due to heavy rainfall, precluded the use of motor transport.
>
> On 11th February 1958, this development was taken a stage further with the introduction of a new system whereby Inspecting Officers will be arriving by air. At 8.30 a.m. the Deputy Commissioner, Lieut-Colonel B. G. Spurling, the Quartermaster, Police, Captain J. T. Thompson, and the Chief Staff Officer (Police Reserve), Captain R. J. Parry, assembled at the new Salisbury Airport to initiate this unorthodox departure from accepted routine. Seven minutes later the whole party was airborne in a Cessna 180 aircraft of the Police Reserve Air Wing (Mashonaland Flight), piloted by No.7056, Police Reserve Pilot Rex, DFC, an ex-R.A.F. fighter pilot, and one of the 19 pilots of the Wing.
>
> The journey from Salisbury to Fort Victoria by road is 191 miles. By air this was covered in one hour

Cardinal
VP-WEE

Alan Murray and Passengers
Pilot Alan Murray shelters in the shade of his aircraft VP-WEE. The other two men appear to be passengers as indicated by the two camouflaged FN rifles and the two packs. (Photo by Alan Murray)

Left to right: Captain R. J. Parry, Chief Staff Officer (Police Reserve) PRP Paul Rex DFC, Deputy Commissioner Lt-Colonel B. G. Spurling, Captain J. T. Thompson, Quartermaster, became the first inspecting officers to arrive at remote stations by air on 11 February 1958. They took off in the Cessna 180 from Salisbury Airport at 0830 hours for Fort Victoria arriving there a little over an hour later, a significant improvement over the time needed for the same trip by road. (*The Outpost Magazine*)

Superintendent Tim Allan, Assistant Commissioner Pat Mc Colough: Commissioner P. W. D. R. Sherren, consult over a map on the wing of VP-WDE. (Photo by Keith Holshausen)

four minutes flat, including a couple of circuits over the Fort Victoria Police Camp to study the layout of the buildings and development. Soon the Deputy Commissioner was engaged with the Officer Commanding Police, Victoria District, Captain R. Sobey, on a Police and St. John’s Inspection Parade, followed by an inspection of the camp and quarters.

The Quartermaster, meanwhile, was engaged in checking building development and requirements, plans and siting, and the Chief Staff Officer (Police Reserve) on Police Reserve Rifle Club and radio matters, including an inspection in loco of the rifle range galleries now being built.

By 3 p.m. all that had to be done was done, and shortly afterwards the whole party was airborne from Fort Victoria, passing over a countryside waterlogged with rain, through several heavy downpours to be back, safe and sound, in Salisbury by ten past four in the afternoon. The most striking thing about this new development is the speed of movement, the comfort of travel and complete elimination of any wasted time.

Police Stations in districts hitherto remote and inaccessible are now within easy reach of Headquarters and yet, withal, this mode of travel is proving cheaper than the conventional motor transport with which we are all too familiar—the long, dusty, hot, tiring hours behind the wheel just burning up the miles to get from A to B. It can be confidently predicted that, in the not-too-distant future, an airstrip will be a necessary part of a District Police Station layout and the handbook.[3]

The Cherokee owned by Alan Abrey had six seats which was a useful aircraft for courier flights, ‘but,’ he noted, ‘one had to always be very conscious of the maximum all up weight limitations and the loading envelope, as some flight organisers saw a roomy six-seater aircraft and expected one to take 5 pax [passengers] with kit, FNs etc, sometimes tool boxes, and often off rough short strips. They then wondered why pilots would only take 4 pax.’[4]

Abrey also wrote about his ‘rather unnerving incident’ with the Selous Scouts:

Superintendent Tim Allan, PRP John Plant (MD Techair), Assistant Commissioner Pat Mc Colough, Deputy Commissioner P. K. Allum, Commissioner P. W. D. R. Sherren, Chief Superintendent Guy Houghton, PRP Mike Gardner (Techair). It is likely that due to the makeup of this party, three of them would have flown in the Aztec piloted by John Plant and the other two would have been flown by Mike Gardner in another aircraft, not visible. (Keith Holshausen Research, photo by Bill Linfield)

> I was based at the Fort Victoria JOC for eight days and quite late one afternoon was asked to fly to Mabalouta airstrip near the Mozambique border and pick up four pax and fly them to Nkomo Army base outside Salisbury straight away. I was told not to be surprised with the pax as they were ‘funnies’, which I assumed were undercover troops. On approaching Mabalouta I contacted a radio call sign on the ground who assured me that the airstrip was secure. After landing, as I was taxiing to what looked like a parking area, four men with black faces and wearing khaki overalls and caps and carrying AKs walked straight out of the bush towards me. I thought, “this is it, I’ve been conned into landing” and I think, if there had been enough runway left, I would have opened up the throttle and taken off. I was mighty relieved to see big smiles from the men and white hands waving. That was my first contact with the Selous Scouts and on the flight to Salisbury I was amazed to hear them talking to each other about their activities of the last few days. Sadly, two of those four Selous Scouts that I met on that occasion were killed before the end of the war.
>
> Another most interesting three days I remember was when our security forces were mounting operations against Terr training camps in Mozambique, one of which was beyond Cabora

Bassa, which required helicopters to land on an island in the lake to refuel from a store previously placed there. I had to fly General Hickman and his A.D.C. to various bases on Rhodesia's Eastern border over that period, so that he could monitor info coming in from our forces. I shall never forget the last evening at the base near Mozambique's border beyond Mt Darwin, when all the Alouettes that had been on the raid beyond Cobora Bassa returned. It was at sunset as about 12 to 15 came in together, with their red strobes flashing and that distinctive whine of their motors that made the hair on one's neck stand up.

After the debriefing for senior army officers, General Peter Walls asked me if there was room for him in my Cherokee 6 when I took General Hickman and his A.D.C. back to New Sarum, so at about 10 pm that night en route to Salisbury over the big *koppies* (hills) north-west of Mtoko, I couldn't help but think what a disaster it would be for Rhodesia's war effort if my engine stopped over that terrain with the two most senior army Commanders on board – let alone for me!

Another flight I was called upon to do fairly regularly because of the Cherokee 6's space, was the 'Navy Run,' which was dropping and picking up personnel who manned the patrol boats on Kariba Lake. This usually involved starting at Bumi Hills then landing at Binga, sometimes at Milibisi and ending up at Deka Mouth. The take off from Deka Mouth was invariably between 12.30 and 1 pm with an outside temperature exceeding 100F, and if my memory is correct, it was not a very long strip.[5]

Allan always had to persuade the men to send their heavy toolboxes by road, otherwise the aircraft would never leave the ground in the extreme hot and high conditions.

Retiring after 10 years as regular policeman, Philip Nobes, entered the aviation industry, earning a commercial licence and instructor rating. He recalled one of his more memorable flights was following a farm attack on 24 January 1973. He was employed by Techair who were often the first to be called in an emergency because they were based at Charles Prince Airport, near Salisbury and had a ready fleet of aircraft. In appalling weather and under extreme pressure, he had been asked to transport forensics officers to the scene of the attack. Forced to fly at low level he followed the nine-foot tar Centenary Road through rising and descending terrain. He relates that 'out of the mist I spotted a grass runway with many vehicles in the vicinity, so I landed the Cherokee on the strip – what I didn't realise was there were big areas of standing water – somehow or another we stuck and slid without hitting any vehicle or people.'[6]

While preparing a murder docket following an attack on Chaona Farm, Centenary, the CID decided that an aerial view of the farm would be acceptable evidence and save hours hand drawing the plan of the farm. They requested the help of the Matabeleland Police Reserve Air Wing. After polishing the Perspex windows the investigators were flown over the farm and obtained the necessary pictures for the court

On a few occasions Bob Needham flew Assistant Commissioner Mike Reeves and other BSAP Special Branch personnel to the Caprivi Strip in South-West Africa for South African Police liaison visits. Bob wrote that 'the SA Police were always very generous to us, and we would return home with the aeroplane loaded to the gunnels with boxes of 9mm and .762 ammo, hand grenades

A view of Charles Prince Airport (previously Mount Hamden) in January 1974, from Piper J3C-65 Cub VP-YFT, belonging to Mashonaland Flying Club. (Photo by Robin D. W. Norton)

Commissioner P. W. D. R Sherren and Senior Assistant Commissioner Sandy Saunderson. (Officer Commanding Manicaland Province) carry out an inspection. (Photo by Keith Holshausen)

PRP Adrian Munch plots a flight plan as Senior Assistant Commissioner Alan Rich, looks on during an inspection tour in Manicaland on 24 May 1979. (Photo by Keith Holshausen)

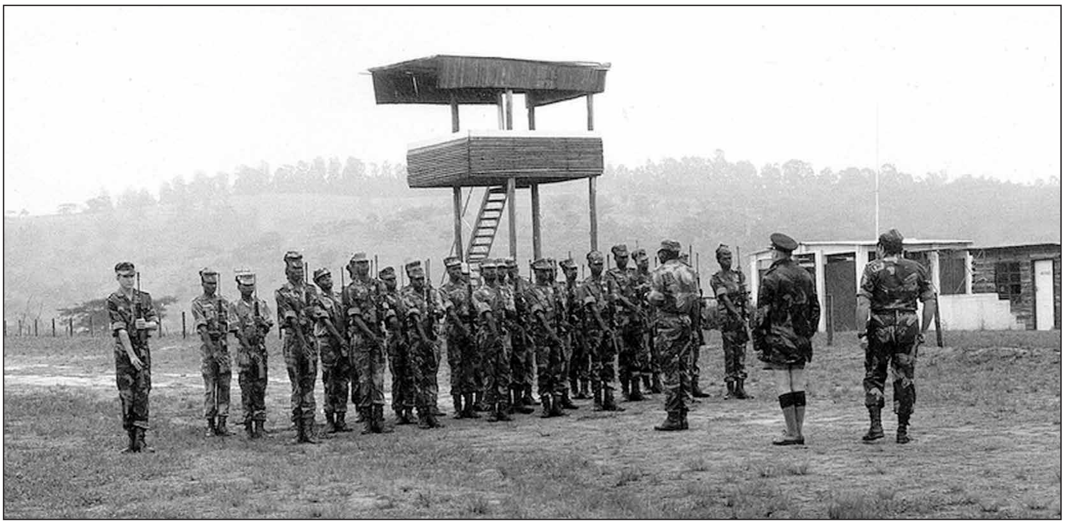
Senior Assistant Commissioner Alan Rich, as OC Manicaland would have frequently made use of the PRAW aircraft to visit outlying stations around the province. Here Rich and PRP Munch are seen at Ruangwe with Cessna 172 VP-WCU. (Photo by Keith Holshausen)

and bottles of top-quality South African wine. These flights were to an airfield close to a SA Police camp situated on the southern bank of the Zambezi River.'[7]

Not all courier flights went that well. On 5 September 1978 Major André Dennison and his 2IC, Captain Jean Vos were flown down to Bolo Ranch airfield, north of Sengwe. Dennison revealed in his diaries that it was 'an interesting trip as the pilot got them lost and the Browns [the army] had to save the day by working out a new plot.'[8]

Christmas Eve 1978 was reported by *The Outpost* as

> a busy time for the PGHQ Flight of the Air Wing. Roy Anderson had the honour of flying the Minister, Mr Hilary Squires, and the Chief Staff Officer (Operations), Senior Assistant Commissioner Ron Gardner, around the Op Hurricanie area, taking in Makuti, New Kanyemba, Mashumbi Pools, Sipolilo, Mazarabani, Dotito and Madziwa.
>
> The Commissioner, Peter Sherren, was flown by Roger Patterson on a two-day schedule covering the pre-Christmas Friday and Saturday, was accompanied on the first day by the Chairman of the Police Conditions of Service Board, Mr Bill Basson, as well as his staff officer, Chief Superintendent John Worden. They visited Shabani, Buchwa and Inyala, made a low pass over Inyati's waterlogged strip to drop a suitably endorsed carton of cigarettes and then flew on to Nkai and Gokwe. The scheduled trip to Nembudziya Base had to be cancelled because of a lack of time and the weather and, in fact, much of the trip consisted of hedgehopping and storm dodging with arrivals and departures in very poor visibility.
>
> The Deputy Commissioner (Administration), Mr George Atkinson, piloted by ex-regular Phil Nobes, likewise, experienced bad weather on his tour of Matabeleland and Lake Kariba. First stop from Salisbury, Lupane, was located with some difficulty but at least it wasn't raining on the ground. Flying into Wankie Main Airport, the three-mile-long runway was located between the squalls but the road trip to Dett, without the ability to dodge showers, was a dampening experience.
>
> Back in the air, conditions worsened towards Panda-Ma-Tenga where heavy rain and a very wet strip precluded a visit to the station itself (to say nothing of the mine discovered next to the airstrip the previous afternoon!). This fleeting visit to the Botswana border resulted in an early arrival at Deka.[9]



N Troop Support Unit present arms in the Guti during an inspection visit to Chipinga in June 1978. (Photo by Keith Holshausen)

The trip also included Binga-by-the-Sea and Bumi.

Resupply flights fall into the same category. Paradise Island, a small islet west of Bumi Hills was used as a marine division base for four or five patrol boats. Air Lake's Peter Anderson used to run regular supply flights with his floatplane to the island. He wrote that:

> when flying military higher ranked officers, he would radio 'Paradise, this is Copper 42, and we have three for breakfast. Estimating yours 20 minutes. Out.' This would

When an insurgent was captured, they were routinely removed from the contact area for interrogation and assessed for integration into the RSF. The fact that the person being put in the aircraft by BSAP Support Unit personnel is face down would indicate he is not a casualty and could be a prisoner. (Photo by Alan Murray)

VP-YVE
VP-YVE

Cessna 172 VP-YVE seen here at the old Mount Darwin airstrip in 1969/70. Zerro Sabak was the Officer in Charge of Chesa African Purchase Area and was flown by PRAW pilot Mike McGrath on surveys to plan the construction of roads and bridges. (Photo by Zerro Sabak)

> give the team on the island time for a quick clean up and a uniform change. I also used to drop newspapers and mail into the operational boats with a 90% accuracy rating. I did more flying for the marine division than any other unit.[10]

On one supply mission in 1978, Peter Anderson recalled a drop that did not go to plan. He said, 'the technique was for the army dispatcher to push a box out and at the same time Peter would apply some right rudder which helped propel the box beyond the float. All went well until the last box. The static parachute line slid down the float and hooked over the small rudder positioned at the rear of the float. The box trailed behind, twisting in the slipstream.'[11] The dispatcher wanted to try to cut the line, but Peter vetoed that idea. He managed to make it back to base and land safely on the water.

On many occasions Rhodesian businesses and the government had effectively circumvented the strict UN imposed trade and arms embargos. Inevitably, there were others who released information on the mechanics of sanctions busting. A bank official, Kenneth Macintosh, who had been sentenced to 16 years imprisonment for economic espionage, escaped and managed to reach FRELIMO controlled Mozambique. On 22 February 1975, flying a Techair Aztec ZS-EIG as Copper 167, Mike Gardner was tasked by PRAW to take two Special Branch members to collect Macintosh. He was handed over to the Rhodesian Police and was flown back in leg irons.

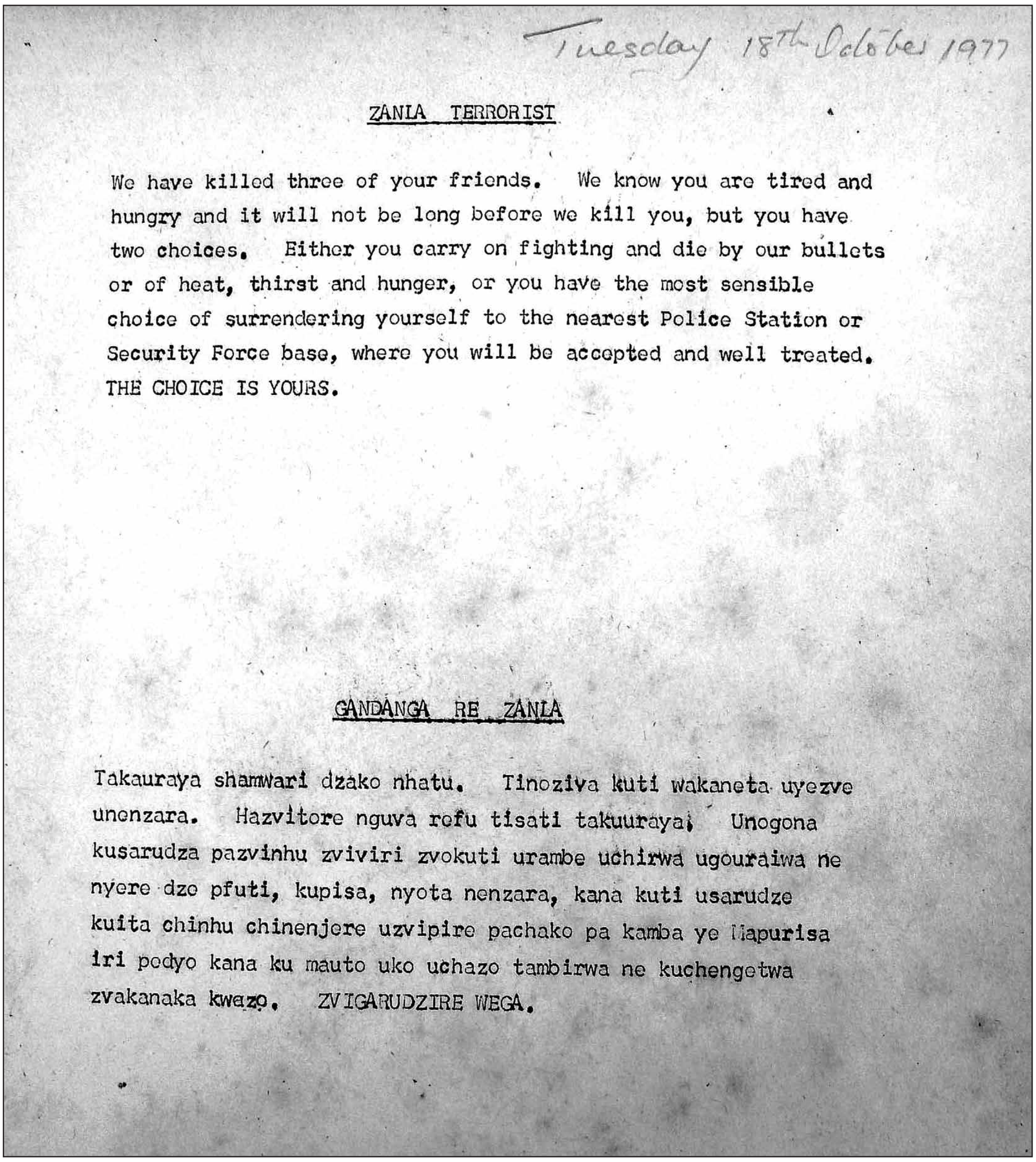
Telstar – Overhead Radio Relay and Surveys

The technology of the late 1970s, meant that often PRAW pilots and observers would spend many tiring hours providing a communications link between various ground patrols, in hilly and rocky terrain. As Allan Abrey recalled 'This involved flying slowly in a circle at about 5,000 feet AGL and relaying messages from the various call signs to and from the Commander in Charge. This could be very boring flying slowly around for hours or it could become very exciting like looking down on to a chess board below.'[12]

During cross border operations Rhodesian ground forces relied on communications relayed by PRAW aircraft. The Air Wing crew would orbit at 10,000 feet at the border crossing point and relay messages from Joint Operations Command (JOC) and the aircraft and troops operating across the border. For Rhodesian C Squadron SAS and the two-man Selous Scout units that operated clandestinely in Zambia and Mozambique, PRAW was, for weeks on end, their only contact back to base.

Pamphlet Drops

National serviceman David Russell wrote that during his National Service with the BSAP between 1977 and 1979 he was a COIN and weapons instructor for PATU in Manicaland. He was involved in many different aspects of the war, from training PATU and police reservists and captured ZIPRA mujibas to running battle camps



Tuesday 18th October 1977

ZANLA TERRORIST

We have killed three of your friends. We know you are tired and hungry and it will not be long before we kill you, but you have two choices. Either you carry on fighting and die by our bullets or of heat, thirst and hunger, or you have the most sensible choice of surrendering yourself to the nearest Police Station or Security Force base, where you will be accepted and well treated. THE CHOICE IS YOURS.

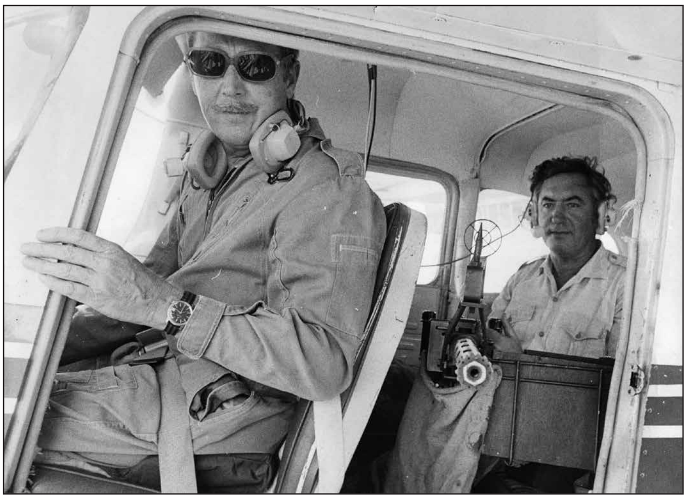
GANDANGA RE ZANLA

Takauraya shamwari dzako nhatu. Tinoziva kuti wakaneta uyezve unenzara. Hazvitore nguva refu tisati takuurayai Unogona kusarudza pazvinhu zviviri zvokuti urambe uchirwa ugouraiwa ne nyere dze pfuti, kupisa, nyota nenzara, kana kuti usarudze kuita chinhu chinenjere uzvipire pachako pa kamba ye Mapurisa iri pedyo kana ku mauto uko uchazo tambirwa ne kuchengetwa zvakanaka kwazo. ZVIGARUDZIRE WEGA.

A rather crude flyer in English and Shona probably dropped over a recent contact area on Tuesday 18 October 1977. These would have been produced off a Roneo machine, which at the time was a state-of-the-art technique to quickly duplicate documents before photocopiers were invented. (Photo by Alan Murray)

at the former Outward Bound School in the Chimanimani Mountains. He wrote:

> We had been getting close to Psyops Operations in the Army, the "hearts and minds" people who wanted to win the war using psychology. Our involvement came about in identifying specific Tribal Trust Lands (TTLs) and areas where terrorist activity was rife and where much of the population was heavily intimidated by the terrorists using the most vicious of techniques.
>
> PRAW was given the job of distributing propaganda leaflets over the TTLs bordering Mozambique in Operation Splitshot. The Army Psyops operators had gruesome and very graphic posters and leaflets for distribution. The booklets were distributed in Tribal Trust Land business centres and leaflets posted at schools, clinics, and district commissioner bases. Many leaflets were randomly air dropped in more remote areas. These hard-hitting propaganda posters had crude cartoons of terrorists intimidating rural villagers and contained slogans exhorting the people to resist and report terrorism.
>
> It had been suggested we were supplying the villagers with a year's supply of toilet paper! And there was lots of paper – they had prepared thousands of posters packaged together in bundles. The posters were printed on that coarse recycled paper so prevalent in Rhodesia at that time, a result of sanctions, and because of the crude diagrams, always reminded me of rather gruesome children's colouring books! The bundles were to be distributed by air over the affected parts, and I was volunteered to be the dispatcher.
>
> To avoid the turbulence associated with the hot summers we took off early in the mornings from Grand Reef forward airfield in small Cessna aircraft and headed off to the TTLs along the Mozambique border. This activity required some good navigation and fairly low and slow flying in order to dispatch the opened bundles of posters to designated areas. We had to fly low and slow in order to open the windows to throw the leaflets out and this in my opinion made us sitting ducks for any terrorist who wanted to take a pot shot at us.



The Pearce Commission was set up in 1971 by Sir Alec Douglas-Home to evaluate a proposed constitutional settlement. It was at this time that PRP Jimmy Aitken and PRP Kevin Ewart are seen here aboard Cessna 180F VP-WGU. Armed with a .303 Browning, this aircraft sustained damage from ground fire to the starboard wing and door while dropping leaflets. (*Outpost* via E. Pietersen)

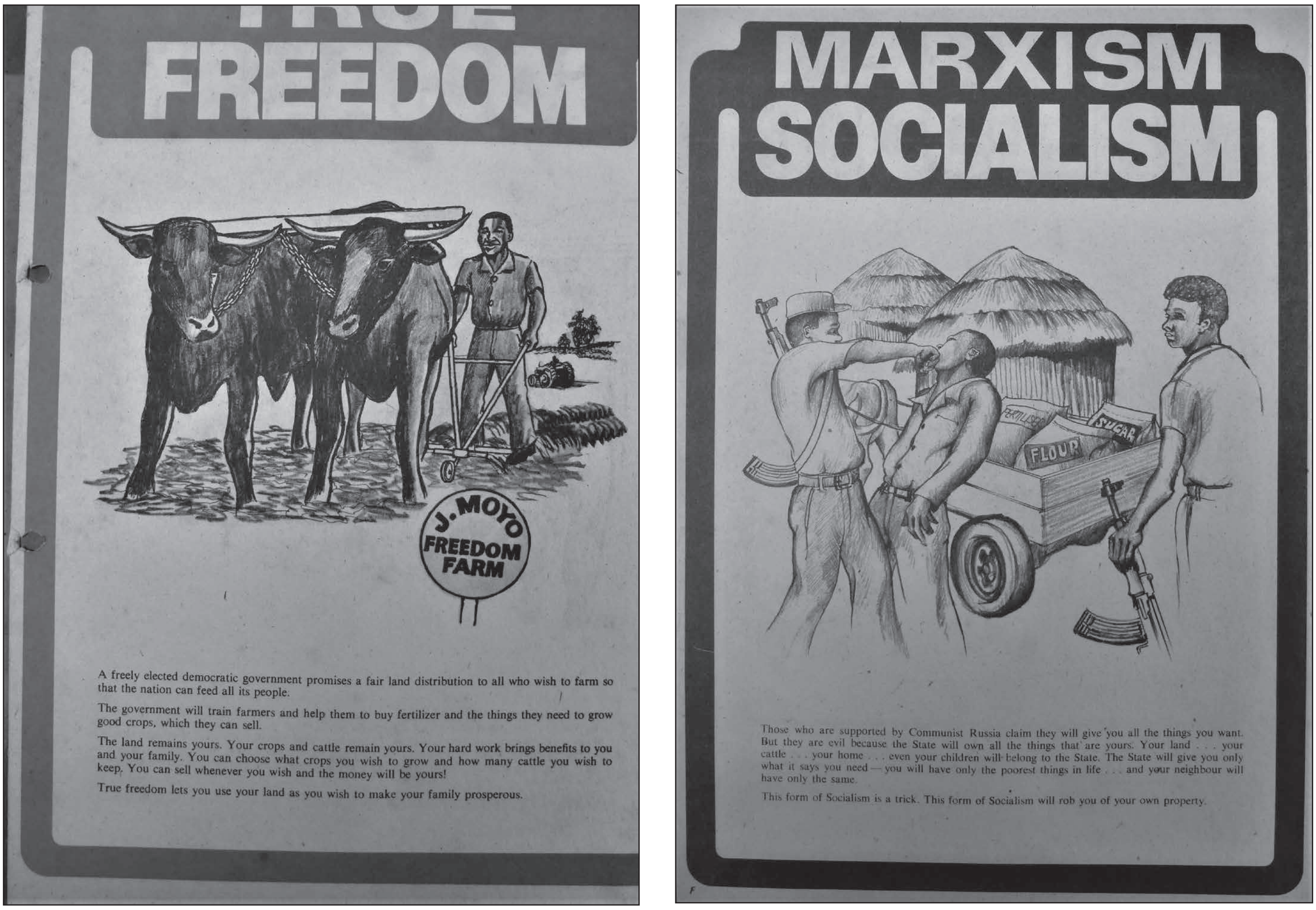
We flew all over Manicaland and saw some interesting places en route. Such as landing in remote Buhera area and going to the Special Branch offices for lunch with the famous Red Baron. He really was a character of note and enjoyed a fearsome reputation as an efficient intelligence operator. His name came from his wild red hair and beard and his Special Branch operatives referred to themselves as his Flying Circus. Needless to say, they thought we were mad and a waste of assets!

During the May 1979 elections the Air Wing who flew some 80 sorties from Mount Hampden alone. Loading pamphlets into Roy Anderson's aircraft at Charles Prince Airport (below right) are Shelagh Anderson, Zak Bondi, Ernie Berk and airport manager Des Anderson. (Photo by Keith Holshausen)

One of my enduring memories was flying into a landing strip near Melsetter (now Chimanimani) on the mountainous border with Mozambique. The landing strip, at Ratelshoek was perched on a flat plateau that stuck out from the surrounding forested hills. The landing was easy, and we touched down at the remote airstrip to be met by BSAP and reservists from Melsetter who took us into the village through back roads in the forests. We left armed guards to look after the plane and have it refuelled.

Some hours later we arrived back at the airfield for the return flight as the sun was just beginning to set and the view from this airfield on the plateau was breathtaking stretching out over forested mountains towards the Chimanimani Mountains along the Mozambique border – the quartzite sparkling in the setting sun.

We boarded the plane and taxied down the runway. Turning into the wind and downhill, the pilot gunned the engine, we set off along the grass runway, and suddenly we were airborne hundreds of feet in the air. The runway had abruptly terminated at the edge of the plateau and the ground fell away vertically down cliffs. Therefore, from taking off and being just airborne



FREEDOM

A freely elected democratic government promises a fair land distribution to all who wish to farm so that the nation can feed all its people.

The government will train farmers and help them to buy fertilizer and the things they need to grow good crops, which they can sell.

The land remains yours. Your crops and cattle remain yours. Your hard work brings benefits to you and your family. You can choose what crops you wish to grow and how many cattle you wish to keep. You can sell whenever you wish and the money will be yours!

True freedom lets you use your land as you wish to make your family prosperous.

MARXISM
SOCIALISM

Those who are supported by Communist Russia claim they will give you all the things you want. But they are evil because the State will own all the things that are yours. Your land . . . your cattle . . . your home . . . even your children will belong to the State. The State will give you only what it says you need — you will have only the poorest things in life . . . and your neighbour will have only the same.

This form of Socialism is a trick. This form of Socialism will rob you of your own property.

To satisfy the international community and the growing demand by the black population of Rhodesia for civil rights, an internal agreement was arrived at between the Smith Government and non-communist backed Nationalist Parties. The result was the emergence of the Republic of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, led by Prime Minister Bishop Abel Muzorewa. This state existed between 1 June 1979 and 11 December 1979. In order to develop grass roots support a set of leaflets were published highlighting the alternatives facing the population. Shown here are examples of the series illustrating life under the new government and what it would be like if the warring nationalist forces came to power. Over the years, PRAW aircraft were engaged in leaflet airdrops. The pilots knew the areas they operated in, RhAF aircraft were freed up for combat duty and a civilian aircraft overhead was less threatening to the people below. (Photo by Alan Murray)

> to flying free hundreds of feet in the air took a second or less. It was one of the most exhilarating take-offs I have ever experienced, and it was all totally unexpected.[13]

Transport of the sick and injured to main hospitals was a regular and important part of PRAW activities. The aircraft were designed to carry four to six seated passengers. On occasion seats could be removed to carry a stretcher case but often the injured had to be manually lifted into the aircraft. This awkward and no doubt painful process is shown here as the casualty is lifted into the Cessna 177 Cardinal VP-WEE. In the back seat, there is a man who appears to be in uniform who could be holding up an intravenous drip. (Photo by Alan Murray)

Casualty Evacuation (Casevac), and Rescues

Casualty evacuation was always a priority irrespective of the condition of the patient. Pilots like Bill Springer would drop everything to fly sick and injured people from remote parts of the country to hospital. He was awarded the MBE in June 1965 by which time he had already made 30 such flights. At the end of the Rhodesian War, Jim Barker reported that during the conflict he had flown out 116 stretcher cases and an unknown number of walking wounded.

Invariably a medic would assist, and a drip would be suspended from some elevated point in the aircraft. Serious cases were flown directly to the nearest town with a properly equipped hospital. Many lives were saved by the prompt reaction of all those involved.

A man and his two sons entered a cave complex to search for bats, which were considered a delicacy by their family. When they had not emerged after 6 days the man's brother entered the caves and found three bodies and called the police. When the police entered the cave complex in January 1976, they found that the smell of bat guano and the dead bodies rendered the air unbreathable. The only way to recover the bodies was to pump clean air into the depths of the cave. A large fan and lengths of ducting were carried over rough ground and set up from the cave entrance and through the various tunnels. To reach the bodies more ducting was needed. PRAW pilot George Donald and observer Cliff Wilcox were tasked to fly in the extra materials. Opening the aircraft's door to make the drops changed the aerodynamics and could have resulted in a dramatic loss of lift. Great skill was required by the pilot to maintain control at a low height on the three passes required to deliver the ducting.

The dramatic rescue for which Bill MacDonald and his observer Dickie Boltt were awarded a commendation began on the afternoon of 17 December 1968. They were ordered to Kariba to carry out a night operation. A South African policeman had been missing in the Zambezi valley for five days and they were to assist ground forces to locate the man.

In the March 1969 edition of *The Outpost* Boltt wrote that they waited until 2000 hours that evening before they were briefed.

> A man had been lost in a section of the Valley somewhere between Chirundu and Kariba. He had gone missing on Friday and today was Tuesday. We jotted down the map co-ordinates from the larger 1:50,000 and then retired to the main airport building where at least there was an unoccupied table, good light, peace and quiet. We had enough to go on to be able to plan a grid search on our 1:250,000 map using the Zambezi as our base line. We reckoned on east–west legs of twelve miles, with half-a-mile intervals between successive sweeps.
>
> This pattern gave us an overlap beyond the "most likely" position of the lost man. We had four hours of safe flying in our tanks, and it was with relief at escaping from the heat on the deck, counterbalanced by no little apprehension of the task before us, that we cleared the strip at 8.50 p.m.
>
> Instructions had been given by the Officer Commanding Lomagundi District that no fires were to be lit by the patrols who were assisting in the search from the ground. Two of these units were a team of the Support Unit, codenamed Askari and who were camped on the missing man's Sunday tracks (with orders to leave them on no account), and our friends in the Sinoia Police Anti-Terrorist Unit, Section Officer Grey, Reserve Section Officer Manning, Patrol Officers Dewar, Jones and Bothwell, and Constable Chamunoda.
>
> This patrol was stationed at a fixed point, with the call-sign of Runner, and with instructions to fire parachute flares at 30 minute intervals in the rather desperate hope that the wanderer would see them and 'home' on to their position.
>
> We arrived over the Zambezi just as Runner's 9 p.m. flare arched into the sky. Its position confirmed that we were on course for our starting point, B Camp on the river. Having confirmed the position of the camp by a peculiar bend in the river, we set course due east on our first leg. Careful timing and absolute accuracy were the order of the night and each leg had to be timed for six minutes to the second. Besides the importance of flying an accurate pattern, Mac had to contend with less-than-ideal flying conditions. We were at 1,000 feet above ground level, flying towards hills, which were completely invisible in the haze, and there was little or no visible horizon.
>
> After six minutes, we swung due north for 30 seconds before turning back in a westerly direction. Another six minutes found

us south of our original starting point. It was obvious that there was a strong crosswind. Having allowed for this and plotted new headings, we returned to B Camp and set off once again.

Thoroughness is a fetish with Mac and, despite the trying conditions, he was not prepared to accept the slightest variation from our planned pattern of search. Chirundu's position was a faint glow in the sky and there were a few visible lights from the north bank of the Zambezi. The flight became a disciplined mental exercise calling for unrelieved mental concentration.

My job was that of observer and navigator and navigating under such conditions demanded split-second timing. The cockpit lights were dimmed to the barest minimum and even the torch, employed for occasional glances at the map, was covered with red plastic. In this blacked-out state, modern watches hardly lend themselves to easy reading and I was forced to count the number of times the second hand swept over the 15-minute mark – that time at which we had started the leg of the search. I had to shut my mind to thoughts such as – "The last time round was four, not five, you clot!" and be ready to give Mac his 30 second warning to turn. We had finished two of the sweeps and were two or three minutes down the westward leg of a third when suddenly something tore my straining eyes from the winking watch face. The distraction was gone before I realised that what had seemed like a shower of sparks might be the object of our search. "Stop! stop!" I yelled in Mac's ear – a silly thing to say to the pilot of an aircraft at the best of times. "No, dammit! Turn, turn. There it is – it's him. It's him!" Strangely enough, Mac got the message and circled. "Can't see a thing," he said. Neither could I, now, and I was beginning to wonder how we would ever get back into the pattern of search when, simultaneously we both saw something twinkling in the trees a longish way off.

We headed towards the light and sure enough, there was a healthy fire from which emerged a shower of sparks as someone added another branch to the flames. With eyes glued on the glow, we reported our find by radio. This done, Mac switched on the landing lights and circled lower. When we were almost brushing the tops of the trees, we overflew the camp sight. In the beam of the landing lights, there was an unshaven European, standing and waving at us frantically. It could be none other than the missing man.

We climbed for stronger radio transmission and Chirundu came through asking our position. And there was the rub! We dared not leave the fire in case we lost it for good, and we were unable to give a precise map reference without returning to a fixed point and taking a bearing on the position. All we knew was how we had arrived in our present position, and, with a little luck, we could direct another aircraft to join us.

Nearly ninety minutes passed as the ether crackled messages between us and Headquarters. Command was in the predicament of appearing to lack the strength of our conviction that the fire we had found was that of the missing man and of being reluctant to mount a full-scale airborne rescue in the murky darkness. The decision was finally reached that we would remain over the position as long as our fuel lasted and then we would be relieved by the RRAF.

Our find would be confirmed in the cold light of day. Runner had been listening out to our conversation from the beginning. It was then suggested that they should attempt to move towards the fire below. They reported that there was a track of sorts leading in generally the right direction and it seemed that nothing would be lost by the venture. Headquarters gave the idea their blessing. We knew Runner's position by the flares which were still shooting up at half-hourly intervals. Leaving Patrol Officer Bothwell and Constable Chamunoda at their static position, the rest of the stick climbed into their truck with as many flares as they could carry and set off up the track with their spotlight shining skywards.

From left to right: The Minister of Law and Order, the Honourable D. W. Lardner-Burke, Police Commissioner James Spink (3743), Pilot Bill MacDonald and his observer Dickie Boltt. These latter two were awarded a commendation for their part in the dramatic rescue of a lost soldier in December 1968. The award read, 'The Commissioner has much pleasure in awarding a Special Commendation to Police Reserve Pilot MacDonald and to Police Reserve Pilot Boltt in recognition of the tenacity of purpose, skill and courage they displayed at Chirundu on December 17, 1968.' (Photo by Keith Holshausen)

The rescue now developed into a race between Runner's ability to negotiate an awful path in the inky darkness and the rapidly dwindling fuel supply of Copper 12. In direct radio contact with them, we urged them on. They responded magnificently – disregarding a tree across their path or the holes into which the truck periodically plunged. Each time they paused at some hazard we flew between them and the fire. Our support from the air may not have taken the form of strictly ethical radio transmissions and it was all very well for us to sit there in the sky asking the impossible of the four men who were being thrown about in a rearing truck. But slowly, almost imperceptibly, they narrowed the gap.

Section Officer Grey reported that the track was wandering from its original direction. The quartet left their vehicle with the spotlight still probing the heavens and set off on foot. With only a pencil torch and their walkie-talkie, they crawled across the intervening terrain between truck and fire. From the air it looked to be no more than a mile; in reality it was nearer two-and-a-half miles. Our fuel situation was getting critical and we urged the men below to greater efforts. They responded by running and, in the darkness and thick bush, the consequences were predictable. Runner's leader crashed into a donga and his yelled "Don't follow me" was cut off as the other three landed on top of him. "Indicate the position of the fire again," they asked. "Roger," we answered. "Damn that donga, we're going the wrong way!" And so it went on. Now and then we caught a brief glimpse of their little pencil torch (it was still burning at the end of the evening and must have had phenomenal batteries) but the light it gave was little better than a cigarette's glow even from our low altitude. Then someone down below had a brilliant idea. They fired a flare and moved – flat out – in the few seconds of brilliant illumination.

It was easy to imagine the effort needed by the four men of the patrol to keep up the pace. The controlled breathing over the radio told its own story of fitness and perseverance. We were sympathetic but in front of us the unwinding fuel gauge was like a time-bomb. Mac's flying was nothing short of brilliant and the matter of fuel economy will ever remain a secret between him and the engine. Never once did we stray from the dotted line between the fire and the truck's skyward pointing beam of light. Time and again we rocked as we turned into our own wake. We strafed the fire continually to keep Runner on the right track until they excitedly reported that they could smell the smoke.

At long last the four men parted the dense bush and saw the fire. There was still time for caution – the lost man was nowhere to be seen. Runner yelled a challenge, and a careful reply came out of the darkness. Then were the patrol (and Headquarters) completely convinced that the operation was over – at least, almost.

There remained the problems of getting rescuers and rescued back to their truck. "Can you help us? We won't be able to locate the vehicle in the dark," came the anxious request from below. 'Sure," we replied, with more confidence than our fuel supply entitled us to. And so again began the process of flying between the lonely truck in the middle of the bush and the fire which Runner had thoughtfully stoked up before setting out on the return journey.

Although we were into the early hours of Wednesday morning, Mac's flying was as careful and controlled as when we had taken off from Sinoia and that seemed like years ago. Eventually the patrol and the rescued man reached their truck and set off for civilisation. As a parting gesture we relayed their report on the condition of the wanderer and then set off for Kariba with the good wishes of Headquarters at Chirundu ringing in our ears.

We landed at Kariba where the RRAF were very good to us; re- fuelled the aircraft for us and offered us beds. We had to refuse their hospitality, Mac had sheep to dose in the morning and I had an office to run. At 1.30 p.m. we took off for Sinoia and Maningwa strip where our flares were still burning, albeit (as we discovered the next day) very short of fuel.[14]

These pictures appear to have been taken on the same day at the same FAF. The man in camouflage, carrying a side arm, seems to be the same person in both instances. The casualty brought to the PRAW aircraft on a stretcher and being helped up is either a civilian or insurgent, as he is not wearing any kind of uniform. He would have been lifted into the cabin of the Piper PA-28-181 Archer II VP-WLI and sat on a seat as walking wounded. (*Outpost Magazine* via E. Pietersen)

The larger PA-32-260 Cherokee Six VP-YRS was able to take a stretcher case, loaded through the port side door. The person wearing a helmet at the door is almost certainly the technician/gunner from the helicopter that brought in the casualty from contact to the FAF for onward transport to more advanced medical care. Typically, a medic would fly with the patient to ensure fluids were being administered via a drip as seen here. *(Outpost Magazine* via E. Pietersen

Days after this, an Air Wing sortie saved the life of a Chief's wife by dropping fresh serum after she had been bitten by a snake near Kariba.

Peter Marchussen, Copper 43, started out with PRAW in July 1976 flying as the observer/navigator for Peter Richards, Copper 44. They were called out to casevac a soldier who had lost a leg in a landmine incident. The crew flew to the Matusadona area north of Centenary to pick up the injured soldier; his name was Oscar Nielson. At 2000 hours they landed on an airstrip in the bush and picked up Nielson who was accompanied by a medic. They flew to Salisbury Airport where Neilson was transferred to a waiting ambulance, but he would not allow the ambulance crew to leave before he had thanked the two Peters.

For John Plant medical support flights were frequent. One flight was to take an RAR soldier who had volunteered to supply blood to a fellow wounded soldier who was at a mission station and desperately needed a blood transfusion. The whole flight was taken up by the pilot explaining the process to the very uncertain donor.

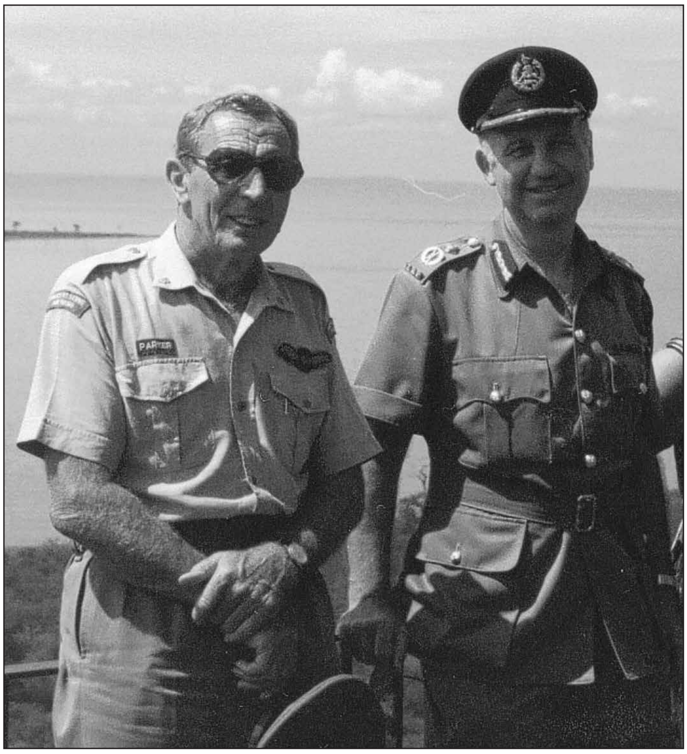
He also experienced the anguish of flying a young rural girl of between 8 and 10 years old. She had found a metal object in the bush, had been playing with it when it exploded. It was a phosphorous grenade. The young army medic was with her and ministering to her throughout the flight to the same mission station, and went with her still holding her hand, as she was lifted from the aircraft and stretchered to the mission hospital.

As the bush war intensified, PRAW played an important role in military casevacs, freeing up air force resources. An example of this was a flight remembered by Bob Fernandes. A rifleman had been injured while on operations in Mozambique and had been brought to Beltbridge by helicopter for onward transfer to a hospital. Bob was the only pilot on hand, it was nightfall, and he was not instrument rated. The nearest hospital was a few miles across the border in South Africa, but they refused to receive a Rhodesian military casualty. An important comfort for Fire Force troops was the promise of early evacuation to a hospital. Bob had to fly the injured man and a medic to Fort Victoria. They encountered a storm and strong turbulence but fortunately, the airport was close and his one and only casevac ended successfully.

As with all the PRAW pilots Peter Anderson was called upon many times to undertake casevac missions. He recalled that one night at 2200 hours, he was sent out to Binga on the shores of the southern part of the lake to uplift a seriously injured solider. Boats based at the small settlement lit up a rudimentary landing area on the water with their lights. For the return flight to Caribbea Bay the police had arranged for the hotels to turn on all their lights, to provide some reference points. Unfortunately, the soldier died during the flight. A more successful casevac required that Peter land on the river downstream of the curved Kariba wall at 'A' Camp to transport three injured soldiers to Caribbea Bay for medical treatment.

In 1978, Canadian Doug Towler was on virtually continuous call-ups with 9th Battalion Rhodesia Regiment, Support Unit. This unit was to be relieved, but there were too few responses to a call-up to man the replacement 5th Battalion. It was only at midday on 31 January, after the arrival of their relief that they could leave Vilas Salazar. On the way to Buffalo Range, they were ambushed. Three RPG-7 rockets were fired. Only one found the lead vehicle, killing two men and injuring several others. Doug recalls a PRAW Cessna making at least five trips to Buffalo Range with, on each trip, three injured on board.

Doug's next encounter with PRAW was on 6 April 1979 when he received a message that his wife had been injured in a car accident. His OC, Lt Martins Naude arranged for him to be picked up by a RhAF C-47 Mabalauta FAF. The aircraft was full of aircraft parts and seven priests and ministers who had been visiting forward areas. As this was a supply flight, Doug only arrived at Thornhill at 1800 hours. He was driven to a PRAW plane that was waiting to take him to Brady barracks airstrip, from where he was driven to the hospital. Doug wrote that he 'cannot recall the names of the fantastic and dedicated pilots involved.'[15]



PRP, Copper 131, Ernie Parker of the Midlands Flight with Chief Superintendent Fred Punter. In 1974, CS Punter was on day two of a ten week tour on bush operations when his vehicle hit a land mine. A helicopter casevac transported him to suitable landing area where he was transported by a fixed wing aircraft to a forward tented hospital at Mount Darwin. Along with four other casualties he was flown back by light aircraft, a typical PRAW flight to Salisbury for surgery. He was on crutches for 12 weeks. (Wayne Kennerley collection)

When Rob Lister's vehicle hit a landmine a few kilometres from Nyanyadzi on 1 July 1979 there were no casevac units from Grand Reef or any helicopters available. PRAW pilot John Connor, Copper 53, based at JOC Chipinga, picked up the communications about a seriously wounded casualty with no immediate possibility of an extraction to hospital. He agreed to fly in marginal weather conditions to Nyanyadzi airfield in his Cessna 210H VP-YWA. Lister, severely injured suffering with a compound fracture of the left femur, a seven-ounce piece of shrapnel in his thigh, fractured shoulder, and cranium, was transported on a mattress in the back of a police Land Rover to the airfield. The PRAW pilot had removed the front right seat and Rob was placed on the floor. Connor then flew Rob and a medic at low level below the clouds and followed the Umtali road to Perrems airport. Rob wrote, 'I spent six months in hospital and John Connor certainly saved my life. I never saw him again and was never able to thank him for his efforts.'[16]

Reconnaissance Flights

The Rhodesian Air Force earned themselves a well-deserved reputation for their skills at finding insurgent bases. Wing Commander Peter Petter-Bowyer, known as 'Boss PB,' became legendary for his reconnaissance skills. He was asked to train PRAW

Cessna Centurion 9J-RIB in Lusaka in early 1970. This aircraft was imported to Rhodesia in 1977 as VP-YWA by John Connor of Chipinga. As Copper 53 he flew YWA in marginal conditions to extract a landmine casualty when there was no other way to get the seriously injured Rob Lister to hospital for live-saving medical attention. (John Coupland Collection via Paul Seymour)

pilots to be able to, as he put it 'master the art of scanning large tracts of ground and become proficient at separating normal from abnormal signs in the vast networks of paths created by men and beasts.' He had found when training air force pilots that the ability to see the abnormal was limited to a very few and this was reflected within the Air Wing. Training given by people like PB and Hammy Dax pointed out to crews the small signs that would indicate insurgent activity. The way different soils compacted through use would be reflected by the sunlight and it was possible to see routes away from a farm attack or towards a major base.

From March to June 1977, PB conducted four five-day camps to identify and then train suitable PRAW crews who would then relieve air force aircraft for combat. The Reserve were trained to instigate a contact and to direct inbound troops and RhAF units. Thereafter the Fire Force commander would take over and the PRAW aircraft would climb above the attack or return to base. An important innovation was the attachment of day-glo patches to the top of combat caps and hats. This made it easier for helicopter and spotter crews to identify their forces in fast moving action within thick bush.

Bob Needham wrote:

> Recce was just something that we all did from time to time. If we found something that we thought suspicious we would report it to the JOC or Airforce who would then send out a 4 Squadron aeroplane or a PATU stick to confirm our suspicions or otherwise. We certainly did not have the ability or the authorisation to call out an airstrike or organise an Air/Ground operation. Once trained, each pilot together with his observer was given a recce area to look after. Each pilot was tasked by the BSAP PRAW to recce their allotted area on a regular basis. Each recce flight had to be tasked and authorised by the BSAP and/or the Army or Airforce.[17]

Participants of a training camp conducted at Marandellas Airfield March 1977 gathered for a course photograph. Back, standing left to right: C. Wilcox, P. Marchusson, RhAF technician P. Wilson, Steve Mason RhAF, Harold Baker RhAF, unidentified RhAF, Nigel Challoner, P. Boxer, Bruce Richards, H. Chisnall, Simon Brown, unidentified, James Archibald, two unidentified, John Manning.
Middle, standing: Ray Haakonsen, RhAF Roger Bowers, in the centre is Peter Petter-Bowyer (RhAF). On either side of him are the all-important caterers.
Middle, squatting: Phil Haigh (KIA Chimoio), Francois du Toidt, Police Reservist Hardsquare, Rupert Hildebrand, Hamish Harvey, J. Doyle, R. S. Evans (BSAP), Jimmy Aitken, unidentified, Sarel Haasbroek, John Connor
Front, sitting: Clive Ward, Cocky Beneke (RhAF), and Hammie Dax. (*The Outpost Magazine*)

A typical PRAW recce incident occurred on 3 September 1977. A Company, 2nd Battalion RAR were operating as Fire Force in the Mtoko area where they were engaged in some minor contacts. A PRAW aircraft reported a camp in an area south of Mrewa. This was followed up by dropping six sticks of troops. Two units came under fire from a cave and could not advance, as the terrain was too difficult. Air support was called for and a Canberra made an accurate and impressive attack on the target. Two men were later killed in the cave, but another armed with an RPG-2 managed to evade the K car.

A 'Lemon' was the term used by the regular forces when they were called out to follow up on a report of a suspected insurgent camp that turned out to be old or false. Recce from the air was not an exact science. When Buster Brown and observer Guy Wannop reported evidence of suspicious activity that they had sighted, the only way to check their report was to put troops on the ground. An RAR platoon sent in to investigate found only the old tracks of five insurgents.

Day and night recce flights were flown by Brian van Buuren. In the daylight hours he would look for patterns in the bush such as the spider web like paths made by insurgent camp sentries, or a reflection, maybe off a cooking pot, would indicate that a base was occupied. At night, it was unusual fire patterns that indicated insurgent activity. Normally there would be a single cooking fire in a kraal, if there were more or smaller ones on the periphery it would indicate that kraal was supporting more people than normal. The grid reference would be noted, and a patrol be sent out the next day.

In Bulawayo, PRAW carried out night recce exercises over the urban townships. These proved the benefit of the tower lights that had been installed. The activities of people on the ground were clearly visible and it was easy to follow vehicles. Mike Simpson suggested that different coloured lights be placed on top of the towers, which would indicate the township and would not be visible from the ground.

Bob Fernandes, Copper 191, would prepare for reconnaissance flights by developing an understanding of the people and by gathering good local and up-to-date intelligence. He felt that it was important to overfly an area and understand the dynamics of the people and their lives. Bob would spend a day talking to people on the ground at government keeps, or military bases. On one occasion, he flew with a turned, ex-guerrilla armed with an AK-47, who pointed out where to find his ex-brothers in arms to the accompanying Special Branch officer.

This understanding of the social norms and traditions led to the rescue of two government employees who were captured after their vehicle hit a land mine. They were held in a hut in a kraal. Gerry Cleveland and Paul Chappe were assisting in the search for the captives when they saw a woman carrying water. They noticed that on two occasions she failed to greet groups of women that she walked past. This unusual and impolite behaviour was enough for the PRAW crew to report in and for ground forces to investigate and ultimately rescue the captives.

Matabele kraals were organised in a grid pattern, while Mashona kraals had no such structure. Early morning flights were useful to observe the patterns, such as children walking many miles to school and back. A change in that type of routine was a strong indication of some interference. Noting the kraal layouts and finding out who lived in each rondavel and who was responsible for certain tasks, became evident from the paths, where they led, and the volume of traffic. Clear toilet paths for men and women were part of a normal kraal layout. A well-used path off a grazing area to the base of a hill leading to a cleared area, was an indication of a food drop off point. From the clearing, a less defined path would wind up the hill and from there further paths would lead to sheltered areas where insurgents sought cover.

April to October were the best months to fly at 1,200 feet, just above the stall, with low engine noise in a left-hand circuit with the sun in the northern hemisphere. Repetitive circling over a village or possible camp by the 'arumanya,' the insurgents' term for these small aircraft, was often a precursor of Fire Force action and the area would be abandoned. A technique was developed to cover ground without drawing attention to the overflying aircraft. Pilots would travel west to east in overlapping circles in a box pattern as indicated on a 1:50 map. It was preferable to spot something and simply fly on and then fly past again on the return leg to simulate a normal transit flight.

When interviewed by Joyce Chadya, Esther Kanhinge said:

> we called it arumanya. It had this sound dhururu. That aeroplane was dangerous because it had binoculars and they could see from the air that there were people down there and they are doing this and that. Sometimes that would happen when we were giving one of the boys some food in the bush. The moment we heard the arumanya approaching he would hide beneath a huge boulder while we pretended to gather firewood like we had no care in the world. Funny thing is that we continued talking with him while he was hiding. But then sometimes the soldiers in the air got suspicious because we were laughing at them with the comrade.

She also talked about how they would conceal what they were carrying in the way of food or supplies to the comrades:

> Sometimes we would pretend to be going to look for firewood. Then we gave them the food and when they were done eating, they gave us back the plates. Here is how we used to do it secretly. The hata that I used to cushion my head from a bundle of firewood that I was carrying on my head was the one that I used. Inside that hata were plates.[18]

ZIPRA and ZANLA had different ways of operating. The former were Matabele who, after external training, would return to their home kraal. Before entering the kraal, they would bury their weapons, which they would dig up as required. As this was a daily event, the path to the cache was clearly observable from the air. They also moved in larger groups, having been trained by the Russian military in more conventional warfare techniques. ZANLA were Chinese trained in unconventional warfare and they would move in smaller very mobile groups. Their camps were often transitory, with a less obvious impact on the countryside.

Major Don Price, OC 1 Independent Company, wrote:

> there was one large camp just north of the Limpopo River which ran parallel to a rocky ridge. This camp was located by Mike Simpson Copper 81 and me flying together one afternoon. As with most of these things one could not be sure, but the tell-tale signs were obviously there. So, as not to compromise, we did not hang around but left and once back on the ground, I put in a small recce team led by a Sgt Duncan MacArthur.
>
> MacArthur, from an elevated position was able to verify the camp and had sightings of various comings and goings. We found out later that they were very busy at the time constructing underground bunkers. The recce team was pulled back to a safe holding position and I from a K Car led Fire Force Delta attack.
>
> We were given fixed wing support initially in the form of a Canberra Bomber, armed with 1,000 Alpha Bombs. I was flown over the camp and marked the target as per usual with White Canister smoke. The Canberra almost immediately commenced his first run in, dropping 500 bombs to the south of the ridge line, then returning seconds later to drop the remaining 500 bombs to the north of the ridge line. All the while, this was going on, K Car remained above the attack and overhead the target. It was like riding on a very corrugated dirt road and at the same time observing the hundreds of flashes of the bombs going off. This

> camp was the only one to have permanent structures, such as underground bunkers, these types of camp were always external.
>
> 1 (Indep) Coy stops were then put down by me and several Hunter strikes were called. The PRAW aircraft, including Mike Simpson were put in a wide circle to help observe any gooks gapping [running away from] the area. At all times PRAW were under command of the Army unit on the ground, in this case 1 (Indep) Coy under me as OC. At no time did they just come into one's area and do 'their own thing'. They were always attached for a short period of time normally helping units that had no air support.
>
> I must say, possibly because of my independent command and being isolated away from the bigger JOCs that I probably, more than any other single OC, spent more time with PRAW. I had great respect for them and together we did some fantastic things and at the same time, accomplished some great kills! Mike Simpson and I broke the PRAW record for number of hours in one day, being airborne as an aerial command post and Telstar at Beitbridge, for 10 hours and 15 minutes.[19]

Cattle thieves took advantage of the confusion of war and incidents of stock theft rose considerably. In response, the police formed anti-stock theft units, which were composed of police details on scramble-type motorcycles and equipped with radios using frequencies compatible with other ground forces and with PRAW. Bill Linfield reported that:

> On the 26th June, 1979, while carrying out a general recce flight in the Nyagadzi area, my attention was drawn to a herd of cattle moving out of a riverine tree line and into a dry river bed. Due to the manner that the herd was moving they were being driven rather than moving on their own. I was able to contact one of the anti-stock theft teams on the ground, giving them the map reference of the area over which I was flying. It transpired that the team were investigating a report of stolen cattle so were anxious to follow up on my observation. I remained orbiting overhead and in a short while the motorcycle team arrived and were able to identify the animals as the ones that they had been looking for.[20]

After three days of running contacts John Brand of A Company, 2nd Battalion RAR boarded a PRAW aircraft to get an aerial view of the contested area and found that the CTs had left the area. Major Dennison wrote about the flight in his diary noting that 'the rest of the day was uneventful save for some hairy flying by the PRAW pilot, Peter Groves, [this was Peter Graves] with Brand hanging on for dear life trying to direct the rounding up of locals for stock theft interrogation.'[21]

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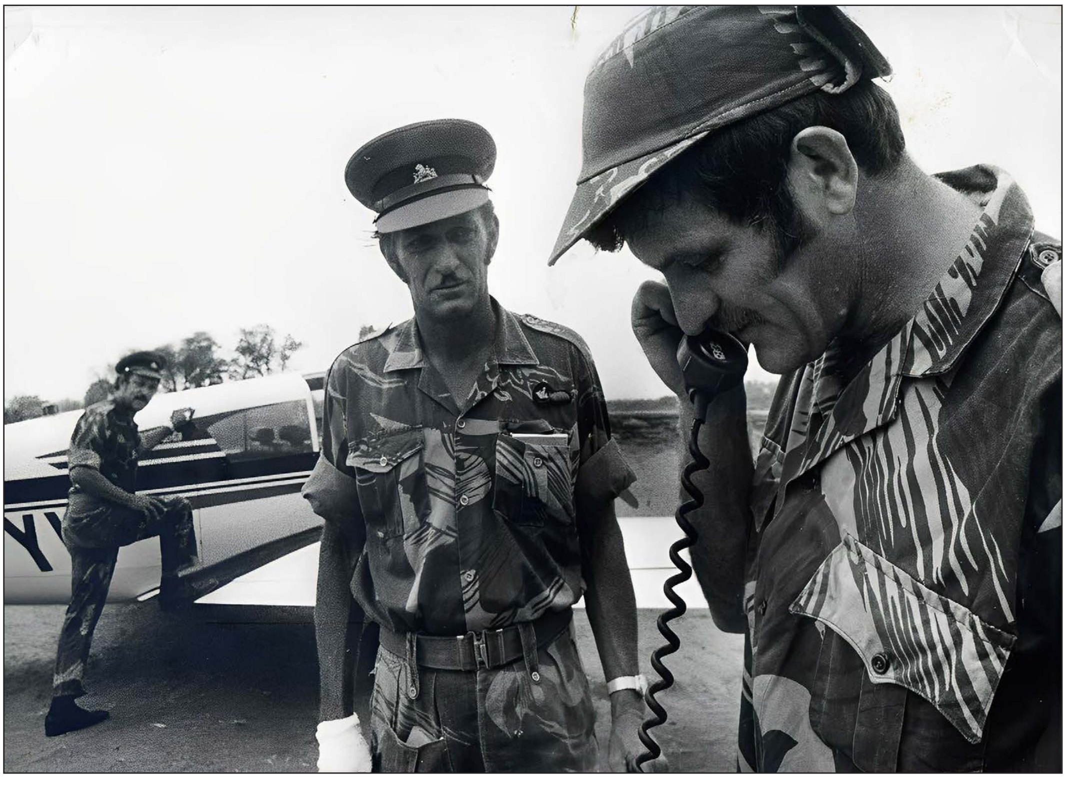
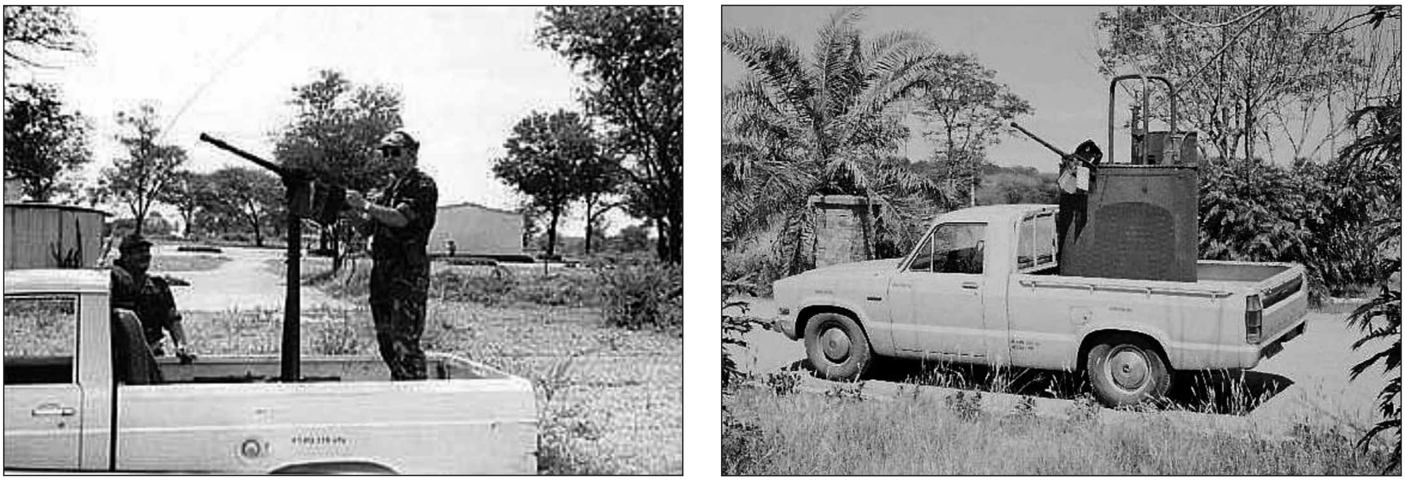
Top Cover

From March 1976 to November 1979, regular BSAP officer, Anthony Trethowan was posted as a Ground Coverage Operator, tasked with gathering intelligence at the very heart of the conflict. He recorded:

> the nature of our work often meant two of us, my sergeant and I operated alone in remote bush areas. To me the PRAW air crew were mostly unknown individuals flying overhead in their small, often unarmed aircraft. Always infinitely patient, calm, encouraging and in my early days on Ops offering this novice combatant guidance that spurred me on.
>
> As I became more experienced, I came to know some of them, if not personally then by name. They served many roles – giving me my location when I was too busy to stop and map read, radio relay, recce and in the combat role of using their single MAG to attack enemy positions or keep them in one place until we could take them on, and always that of guardians.
>
> The first time I worked with PRAW was when I did a recce flight out of Bulawayo over my patrol area in Filabusi. I had never flown in a light aircraft and expected a smooth, quiet flight but as we flew over the Blue Mountains range the midday thermals took hold of the aircraft and did not seem to stop until we landed three hours later. I was terrified. The second time I was persuaded to fly with on a recce out of Bindura over Chinnamora and



Left to right: Hammy Dax, Sarel Haasbroek, and an unknown army officer about to board Piper Comanche VP-YYL. Haasbroek was a PRP so it is unusual to see him wearing Observer wings. (Photo by Fred Punter)



When convoys were first introduced unarmoured civilian Mazda B1600 pickups were fitted with Browning M2HB 12.7mm machine guns. As the number of ambushes increased the fitting was enhanced with an armoured shield to afford some protection to the gunner. Further developments resulted in the turret provide some all-round protection. (BSAP Regimental Association; turreted image by Nick Baalbergen via BSAP Regimental Association)

POLICE
500 C

BSAP reservists manned small Mazda pickups equipped with a single Browning machine gun mounted on a tall fitting with a 360-degree field of fire. Here a convoy waits outside Fort Victoria, ready to leave for Beltbridge. (Photo by Vince Manning)

> Massembura TTLs to locate base camps. This time we got shot at and I vowed never to set foot in a light aircraft again. But I did – again and again and I loved it.[22]

An incident in Chinnamora TTL described by Trethowan typifies regular BSAP action:

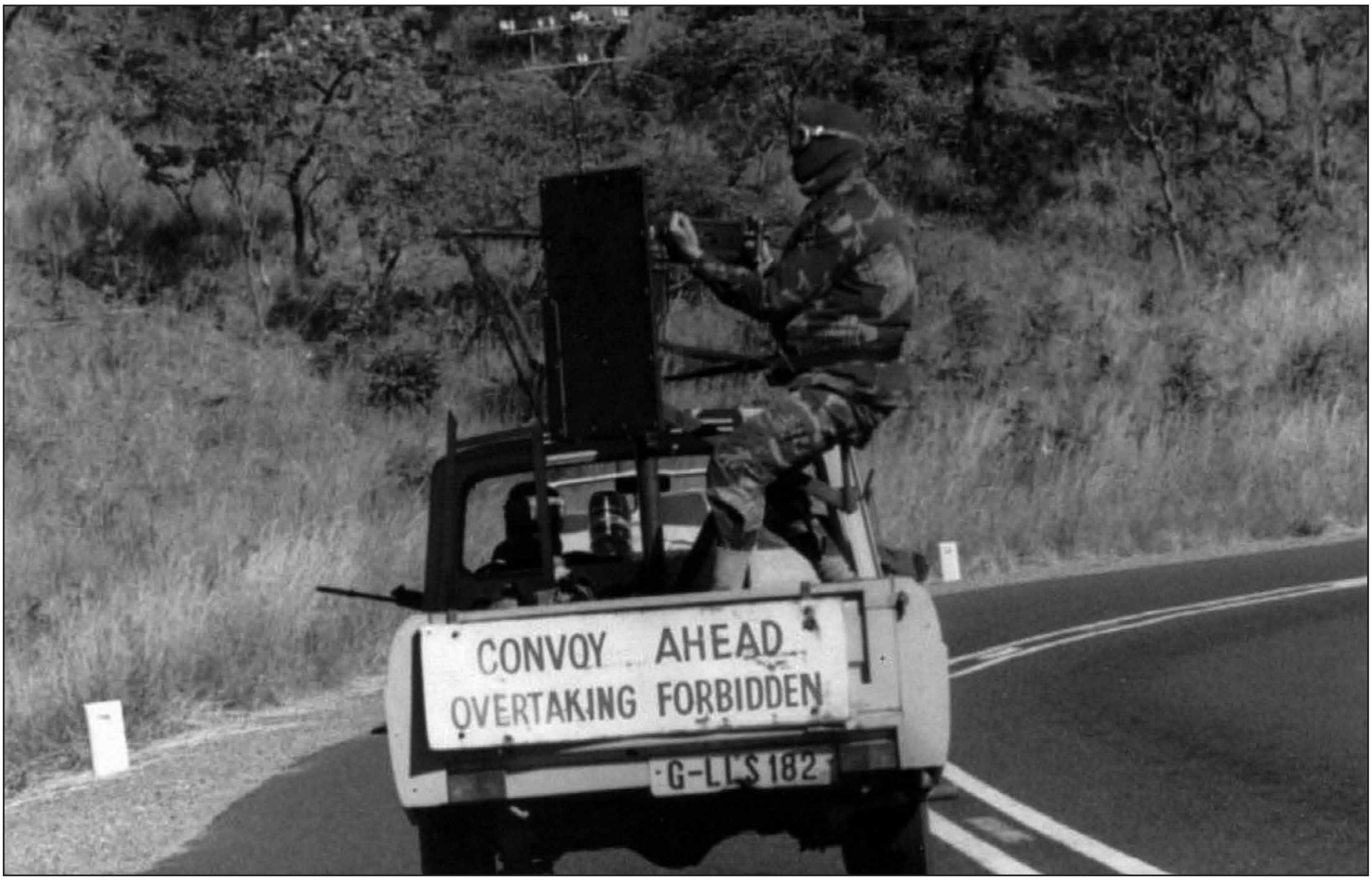
> I had requested PRAW support after an informant had given me the rough location where a small group of insurgents were gathered, and I needed PRAW to identify the exact location and confirm their presence. PRAW pilot Gerry Cleveland quickly identified the place in fairly open bush and as my PATU stick and I were moving to attack, the insurgents broke cover and ran away. The rains had made the flat open ground wet and slow going. I saw a CT sprinting across the ground and at first only heard Gerry's gunner opening-up with his MAG then the site of the rounds hitting the ground behind him, following him until he was hit and went down. As in the way of things I barely stooped to pick up his AK and continued with the contact.[23]

In some instances, a PRAW aircraft was used as an aerial command post. Allan Abrey remembered one such incident in the Chipinga area when he had the Airforce and Army commanders from Chiredzi in the plane with him, to direct an attack on a 'Terr' camp. He wrote that 'it was exciting to see the whole action from above with the Hawker Hunters coming in first, followed by Paras being dropped then the Alouette Fire Force.'[24]

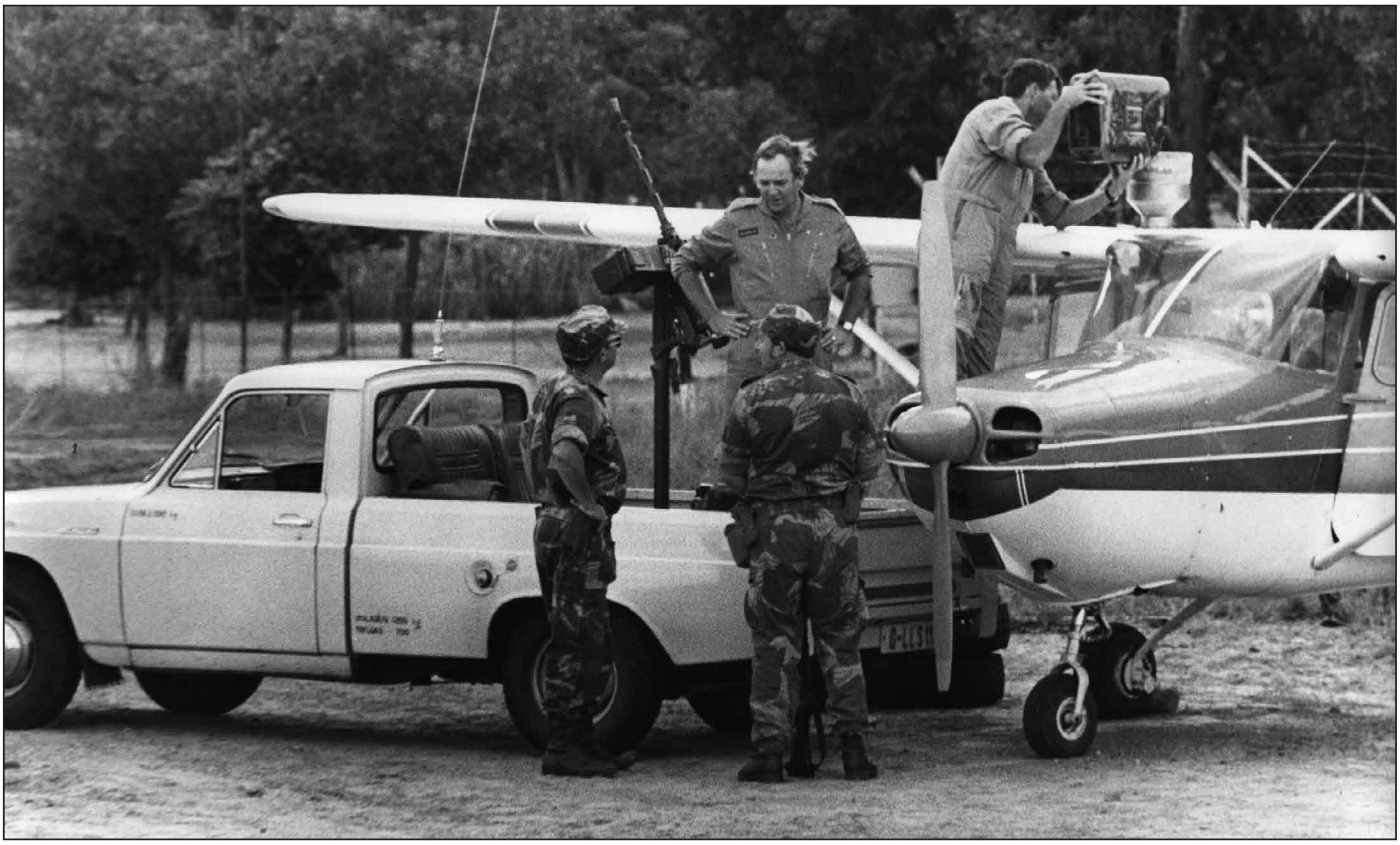
Easter weekend of 1976 brought the conflict even more starkly into Rhodesian lives. Three members of a group of South African tourists were killed in an ambush south of Fort Victoria on the main road to South Africa. From then on movement along Rhodesia's arterial road would only take place during daylight and in the form of guarded convoys. BSAP reservists manned small Mazda pickups equipped with a single Browning machine gun mounted on a tall fitting attached to the load bed, which provide a 360-degree field of fire. There was little protection for the gunner until later when circular metal turrets and crash helmets were introduced.

Private cars, buses and commercial transporters would congregate at convoy assembly points. Drivers, invariably carrying a pistol or automatic rifle, were briefed that if attacked they should move out of the killing ground, pull to the left, get out and find cover. The convoy would then set out at the speed of the slowest vehicle, escorted by a Mazda at the front and one at the back and depending on the size of the convoy, one in the middle.

PRAW crews would fly above and ahead of the convoys, searching for activity at possible ambush points and provide whatever sort of cover they could whenever necessary. As was the case on 11 July 1978, when a 50 vehicle convoy was attacked on a section of the Kariba to Salisbury Road that wound through a hilly area. A coach was fired upon fatally wounding the driver, Samuel Gondo, who nevertheless managed to get his vehicle out of the killing zone. Others caught in the ambush returned fire with their weapons. The low

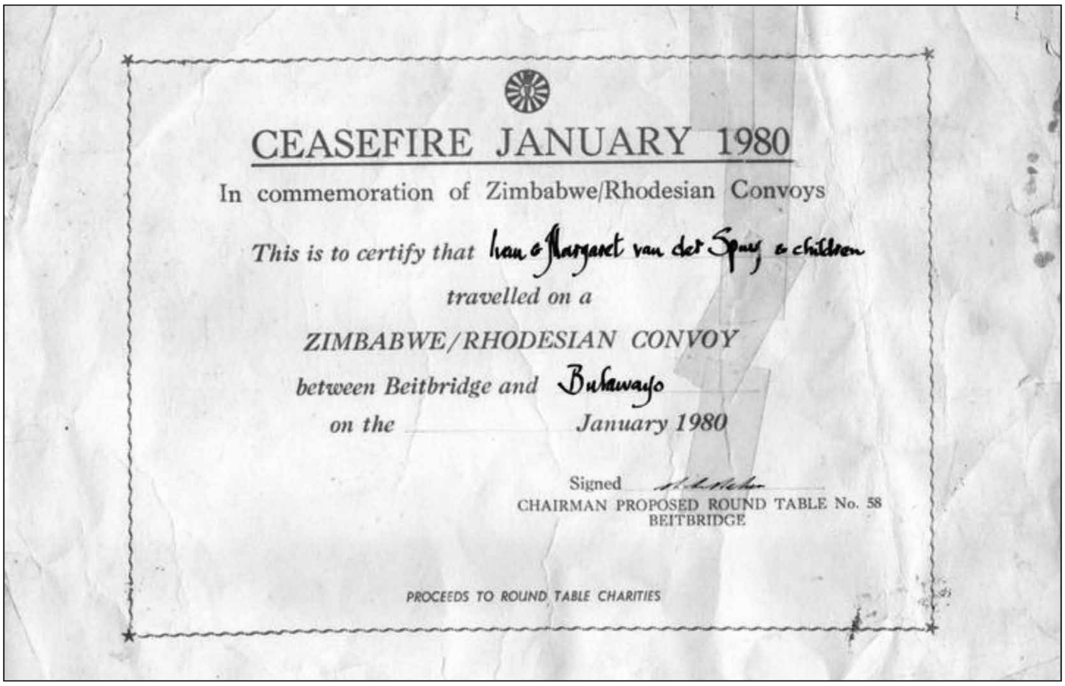


An exposed position with some limited forward armoured plate protection was the lot of the convoy escorts. This escort was watching over a Kariba convoy in 1978, at around the time, 11 July 1978, that PRP Pilot Clifford Wilcox twice dived his unarmed aircraft on an enemy position following an attack on a Kariba convoy. His actions quickly ended the attack. (BSAP Regimental Association)



Refuelling

Vehicle convoys would stop for comfort breaks and the PRAW aircraft flying top cover would land, sometimes on the road, for a break and to refuel. The presence of a convoy escort vehicle, with armed crew in camouflage and hand refueling would indicate such a situation. Seen here near Victoria Falls in 1977, is Cessna 172 VP-WDD owned and flown by Copper 78 W E Plaskett of the Matabeleland Flight. (Eduard Pietersen Collection)



CEASEFIRE JANUARY 1980

In commemoration of Zimbabwe/Rhodesian Convoys

This is to certify that Ian & Margaret van der Spuy & children

travelled on a

ZIMBABWE/RHODESIAN CONVOY

between Beitbridge and Bulawayo

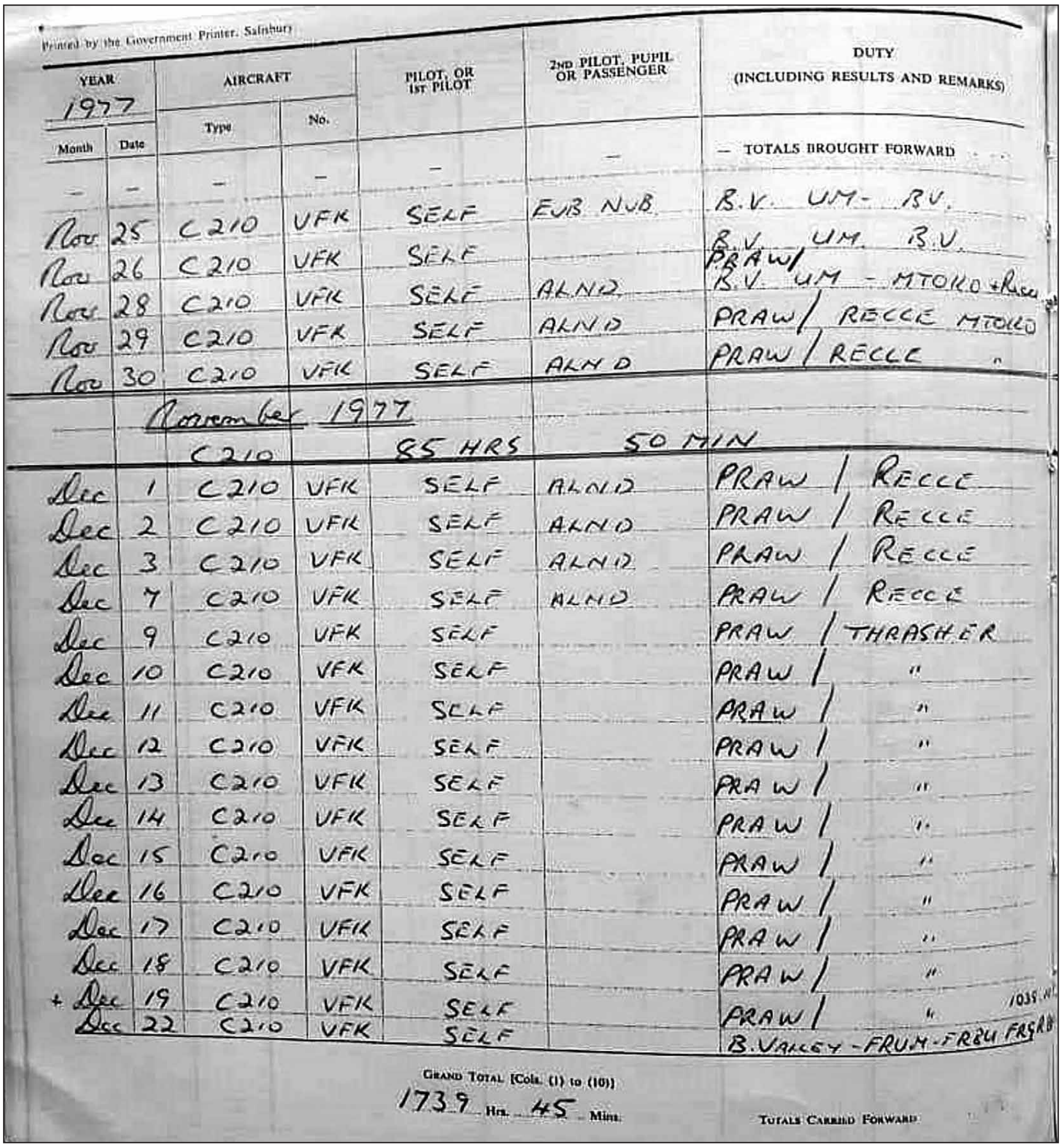
on the .... *January 1980*

Signed

CHAIRMAN PROPOSED ROUND TABLE No. 58
BEITBRIDGE

PROCEEDS TO ROUND TABLE CHARITIES

This certificate was presented to mark the 1980 ceasefire and to commemorate the road convoys, which towards the end of the conflict became so much part of day-to-day life. (Margarter van der Spuy)



Printed by the Government Printer, Salisbury

YEAR 1977		AIRCRAFT		PILOT, OR 1st PILOT	2nd PILOT, PUPIL OR PASSENGER	DUTY (INCLUDING RESULTS AND REMARKS)
Month	Date	Type	No.			
—	—	—	—	—	—	— TOTALS BROUGHT FORWARD
Nov	25	C210	VFK	SELF	EVB NUB	B.V. UM- B.V.
Nov	26	C210	VFK	SELF		B.V. UM. B.V.
Nov	28	C210	VFK	SELF	ALND	PRAW/ B.V. UM - MTOKO + Recce
Nov	29	C210	VFK	SELF	ALND	PRAW/ RECCE MTOKO
Nov	30	C210	VFK	SELF	ALND	PRAW / RECCE "
November 1977						
		C210		85 HRS	50 MIN	
Dec	1	C210	VFK	SELF	ALND	PRAW / RECCE
Dec	2	C210	VFK	SELF	ALND	PRAW / RECCE
Dec	3	C210	VFK	SELF	ALND	PRAW / RECCE
Dec	7	C210	VFK	SELF	ALND	PRAW / RECCE
Dec	9	C210	VFK	SELF		PRAW / THRASHER
Dec	10	C210	VFK	SELF		PRAW / "
Dec	11	C210	VFK	SELF		PRAW / "
Dec	12	C210	VFK	SELF		PRAW / "
Dec	13	C210	VFK	SELF		PRAW / "
Dec	14	C210	VFK	SELF		PRAW / "
Dec	15	C210	VFK	SELF		PRAW / "
Dec	16	C210	VFK	SELF		PRAW / "
Dec	17	C210	VFK	SELF		PRAW / "
Dec	18	C210	VFK	SELF		PRAW / "
+ Dec	19	C210	VFK	SELF		PRAW / " 1035
Dec	22	C210	VFK	SELF		B.VALLEY - FRUM - FRBU FRSRB

GRAND TOTAL [Cols. (1) to (10)]
1739 Hrs. 45 Mins.

TOTALS CARRIED FORWARD

A page from Brian Van Buuren's logbook shows that flights were made almost daily. The term 'Thrasher' refers to the Eastern Highlands operational area. (Brian Van Buuren collection)

flying unarmed PRAW escort aircraft flown by Cliff Wilcox, with observer Theo Venter, dived twice on the attacker's position and were fired upon and hit. However, the aircraft's presence and the perceived threat made the ZIPRA flee the scene. Wilcox and Venter then made another pass over the convoy and dropped a medical pack to assist those helping the wounded. In addition to the gallant bus driver, 2 young women and a child were killed and 16 people injured.

On the long Salisbury to Beltbridge route the convoys would take a break at the *Lion and Elephant* motel. The convoy would park on the side of the road at which time the PRAW aircraft would land on the road and taxi into the lay by to allow the crew to stretch their legs.

Rail transport was vital to the existence of Rhodesia and PRAW provided the same top cover service to keep the goods trains and much-reduced passenger services running. Pylons carrying power lines into middle Sabi, south of Umtali, were frequently destroyed with explosives. Brian van Buuren would be sent to fly at low level along the line and locate where the break had occurred. Knowing there would be an aircraft on patrol, the guerrillas would often wait near the destroyed pylon. For some protection against ground fire Brian sat on the breast plate taken from a flak jacket, but the Cessna Centurion did take some hits.

Brian provided nighttime cover to Internal Affairs Reaction Unit convoys moving into Burma valley or on deployments to farm attacks. The road into the valley was narrow and steep with thick forest on either side, ideal for an ambush. Brian van Buuren and observer Tony Davis would take off in the dark using only the aircraft's landing lights and then circle above the unit's position. Unable to return to the unlit farm strip they would land at Grand Reef and next morning fly back to the farm.

Pressures on the regular forces saw, on a rare occasion, armed aircraft adopt a far more active role. With the RhAF stretched to its limits, PRAW could act as first strike aerial support for ground forces. A pair of PRAW aircraft flown by Wally Barton at the controls of a Cessna 182P Skylane ZS-IUX and Jim Barker in a Piper Cherokee Six PA-32-300 VP-YKA, were ordered to follow up on report of a large group of CTs meeting under a tree. They were briefed to liaise with ground forces if there were any and if not, they were to attack the group. A running battle ensued with heavy fire from both parties, until the aircraft had run out of ammunition.

Appendix

Roll of Honour

Jellicoe, Leslie M. 14681G, 09 July 1978, PRAW pilot (48) MSM

Born on 11 January 1930. Les attended Umtali Boy's High School *c.*1943 to 1947. He represented the first XI cricket side for three years, 1945 to 1947, being one of two top batsmen at the time. His top score while at school was 83 not out against Allan Wilson school in 1945, his consistent batting seeing him selected as a Rhodesian Nuffield cricketer in 1947 – Umtali's first national cap at schoolboy level.

Les was a PRAW pilot (and observer) and was involved quite closely in many flights and operations throughout the 1970s. Disturbed with the lack of firepower from his (and other) fixed wing aircraft Les, together with his father, developed a fitting that allowed twin Browning machine guns to fit in the cockpit. The design was backed and improved upon by the RhAF as well as other PRAW pilots.

Les farmed in the Centenary region but was attacked and killed in the Kariba area. His uncle, also Les, was killed on Choana farm south of Centenary on 4 February 1973. A posthumous MCM was presented to his wife Elizabeth and his son Stewart and was reported in the *The Outpost* of July 1979.

Lawton, Dendy, 13970J, 06 May 1967, PRAW pilot (55)

While engaged in operations at Toronto Farm, Penhalonga, Dendy Lawton and observer Bill Perkins were dropping a message to a PATU unit in mountainous country, when flying towards rising ground his Beech A35 Bonanza VP-YUI crashed into the side of the mountain, seven miles from Umtali on the Penhalonga Road.

Bill Perkins was thrown clear and when he saw the aircraft on fire with Lawton inside, he bravely tried to save his pilot's life but was driven back by the flames. He, along with Assistant Senior Commissioner Eric White, suffered severe burns.

Dendy Lawton is buried in Umtali

Revill, John, 17954, 28 June 1979, PRAW Observer (41), KIA

John Revill was born in Derbyshire, England, on 26 March 1938. His parents emigrated to Kenya in 1952, where he attended the Prince of Wales School. John enrolled in the Kenyan Police Force after leaving school, but in 1969 moved to Rhodesia where he opened a garage.

He joined the BSAP Field Reserve on 17 November 1971 and later volunteered for PATU duties. Always having had a love of flying, John opted to join the Police Reserve Air Wing as an observer. He was a dedicated member of the Mazoe Flight and his expertise was of a very high standard.

Outpost August 1979

> John was the observer and door gunner in a PRAW Cessna 180H N9013M tail dragger. The PRAW team was on a routine patrol flight when they spotted a group of CTs. They fired on the group who returned fire, fatally wounding John in the head. The pilot, Chris Thorne returned to the FAF4 airfield at Mt Darwin, where John was carried off the aircraft unconscious. A camp medic attempted to stabilise John and performed CPR on him, but sadly, he died on the apron of the runway. His semi-military funeral was held at Warren Hills Cemetery, Salisbury, on 4 July.[1]

Springer, William (Bill), Jacob MBE, 3480, 19 July 1969, PRAW Pilot (56), KOAS

William (Bill) Springer and Inspector Terry Shaw died when the aeroplane Springer was piloting crashed in the Vumba Mountains in very similar circumstances to that of Dendy Lawton.

Born on 29 September 1913 in Transvaal, South Africa, Springer was educated at the Technical College in Johannesburg. Married to Lorna, née Sandberg, in 1944 they had three sons, Martin, Billy, Peter and one daughter Lyn. Bill was awarded the MBE on 12 June 1965.

Bill was the Managing Director of Chipinga Garages, a firm he bought in 1944, and was a partner in a steel window manufacturing business. He had arrived in Rhodesia in 1938, and worked for Duly's in Bulawayo. In 1941, he joined the Royal Air Force, representing them at rugby and between 1939 and 1942 represented Rhodesia at wrestling.

When the Umtali Skydiving Club was started at the Perrem's Aerodrome, Bill Springer kindly allowed them the use of his aeroplane.

When the accident occurred, Bill Springer had been scheduled to do a reconnaissance of the border with Mozambique. A PATU stick appears to have got lost and was thought to have strayed across the border and Bill was tasked with searching for the stick.

On board with Springer when the aircraft struck rising ground on Las Anod farm were Inspector Terry Shaw, Paul Rens and Joe McBride.

First on the scene was Bill Perkins, so badly burnt in the Lawton accident. Terry Shaw had died instantly. Again, with extreme bravery, Perkins entered the aircraft in spite of the threat of fire and managed to extract the other three from the plane, all of whom were badly injured. Bill Springer succumbed to his injuries in the Umtali Hospital while Rens and McBride recovered.

Steve Lunderstedt

https://www.facebook.com/groups/chipinga/permalink/820269808073288)

Stam, Angelos (George), 11104T, 23 February 1978, PRAW pilot (60), KOAS

His aircraft crashed in bad weather during a flight between Que Que and Chirdezi. Mrs Wendy Hahn and Mrs Maureen Robinson who were being flown to see their husbands who had been injured in a landmine incident and were in hospital also perished in the crash. A fighter pilot with the Royal Hellenic Air Force during WWII, Angelos came to Rhodesia in the 1940s, where he later joined the Mashonaland Flight of the Police Reserve Air Wing.

He became a well-known and respected figure in flying circles, acting as Chairman of the Mashonaland Flying Club for seven consecutive years. A highly skilled and experienced pilot with over 6,000 flying hours, this Anglo-American head office employee was, at the time of his death, studying for a law degree at the University of Rhodesia.

The Outpost March 1978

An Outfit they Call PRAW

(Words and Music John Edmond)

It was back in the days of the old bush war,
It's a day I won't forget for sure,
We were closing in on the enemy,
They were hidden in a place that we couldn't see.
Then our radio guy called up the JOC
And said, "we need some air support"
Joc came back said" he's on his way"
Gave a call sign and a frequency.

A farmer in a shirt of grey;
For him it was just another day,
When he got the call, he couldn't say no,
Adrenalin up and all systems go,
Rolled his little aircraft out of the barn
On his faraway God forsaken farm,

Jumped in the cockpit and cranked her up
Didn't even have to swing the prop.
His spotter was there you could bet your life;
In the right hand seat was his pretty little wife;
Face like an angel and eyes like a hawk;
Flew in planes before she could walk.
Flew above tree tops' cos what he found
Not a thousand feet above the ground,
Last time he did that they were nearly gone,
Took an AK round in the aileron.

CHORUS:
Copper 1, Copper 2 or is it Copper 3
Copper 4 Copper 5 oh won't you answer me
I dunno your call sign number but one thing that I know for sure,
You're an air wing pilot from an outfit they call PRAW.

Heard his engine commin' out of the East
Then I saw a speck commin' over the trees
And over the horizon he disappeared.
He'd gone in is what I feared
I said "how do you read me are you alive?"
Came straight back and said "I read you 5
My spotter has just seen something shine
In their side of the hill there's an old gold mine"
He said "there's an adit where they might have gone in,
Gonna circle around and keep them pinned"

The rest of the story is history,
They all surrendered to the military.
We'll never forget those air wing guys
When we needed eyes in the skies
Search and rescue and supplies
And casevacs when nobody dies.

From the album Rhodesian Troopers' Legacy
© Copyright 2019 Roan Antelope Music.
https://johnedmond.co.za/

John Edmond was a well-known folk singer who became popular in the 1970s for composing and performing his Rhodesian patriotic songs. The Edmonds moved to South Africa where they own and run a resort named Kunkuru, in the Bela Bela area. He wrote that,

> An Outfit they call PRAW is in admiration of all airmen and airwomen from Air Force to Police Reserve Air Wing. Their skill, sacrifice and contribution was priceless. I was flown by some of these pilots around the operational area to entertain the troops. When I moved to South Africa and during my farming days, I flew a Cessna 180 ZS-RIO with the Commando Air Wing 1997–2003; my wife Teresa was my spotter. This was a unit crewed by all races and genders which assisted in search and rescues, tracking criminals and general police support. It has subsequently been disbanded. (Photo by John Edmond)

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Appendix

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About the Author

In the late 1980s, Guy Ellis began writing aviation articles as a volunteer at the Cape Town Branch of the SAAF Museum. Initially, he contributed to the newsletter, and later took on the role of Editor and contributor for *Air Heritage*, the museum's annual magazine. Through this period, he successfully completed a degree in History and Ancient History, as well as a Masters in Management Engineering, while employed fulltime in the IT industry.

He has authored numerous articles for aviation and naval magazines and e-publications. Additionally, he has built and managed the website for a prominent UK aviation museum, while also maintaining his personal website at www.historyjournal.co.uk.

His published works include notable titles such as *Serve to Save: The South African Air Force at Sea*, *Gloucestershire Airport Through Time*, *Britain's Jet Age 1&2*, and WK275: *The Restoration and Preservation of the Last Supermarine Swift F4*.

Currently living in rural Gloucestershire, he continues to explore little known stories from history, preserving and documenting these for this and future generations, making significant contributions to the field, showcasing his passion for preserving and documenting the rich heritage of aviation.